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**BIRKBECK COLLEGE**  
**UNIVERSITY OF LONDON**

School of Arts

**EXPOSED INTIMACY:**  
A Comparative Study of Self-representation in  
Selected Works by Sophie Calle, Vincent Dieutre,  
and Mariana Otero

by

**Marlène Monteiro**

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2015

I, Marlène Monteiro

declare that this thesis entitled

*Exposed Intimacy: A Comparative Study of Self-representation in Selected Works by Sophie Calle, Vincent Dieutre, and Mariana Otero*

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**Date**.....

## ABSTRACT

This thesis provides a comparative textual, aesthetic, and thematic analysis of self-representation in a selection of films and installations produced in France by three film-makers whose backgrounds and approach to the subject varies: the installation artist, Sophie Calle, the experimental film-maker, Vincent Dieutre, and the documentary film-maker, Marianne Otero. It examines ways in which their films and installations are characterised by certain recurring themes and aesthetic strategies despite their apparent differences. The first chapter contrasts the traditions of literary and pictorial self-representation (autobiography, diary, self-portrait, and essay) with the blurring of such distinct categories in cinema and the visual arts. In the following chapters, a comparative analysis between the three artists points to a recurring representation of a questioning, split, and scattered Self. As a result, a sense of constant *in-between-ness* emerges, and the protagonists' systematic spatial dislocations are not merely geographic and physical but also temporal and mental. The aesthetic constructions aptly reflect their interrogation about their *place* in the world in that the cinematic balance between motion and stillness aptly underscores the fundamental paradox of simultaneous permanence and change, which characterises identity. The abstraction associated with figurations of loss and absence contrasts with a sense of *nowness*, which is reinforced by the prominence of the body on screen, which harks back to more concrete issues and calls for a reflection on theories of affect, the Figural, sensation. Most importantly, the bodies' physicality draws attention to the plasticity of the medium, and the fact that the body on screen is also that of the artist is especially effective. Self-representation is a *mise en abyme* par excellence and cannot be envisaged outside the film-makers' aesthetic reflection upon their practice for their modes of self-representation rely heavily on the specificity of the medium used. Finally, it draws on recurrent patterns, which simultaneously reflect the rituals of self-representation and the cinematic process: passage, repetition, and transformation, through figures of intermediality, re-enactment, or intertextuality. Yet, equally important are figurations of the place and limits of the Self in relation to the outer space of the Other; hence the significance of margins, thresholds, liminality, in which the question of gender is also central.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I started this long and tortuous Ph.D. process, far was I from realising to what extent this would be the most difficult thing I had ever done in my life, intellectually and emotionally. And although it often felt like a solitary journey, I could not have done it without the crucial help of so many people.

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## INTRODUCTION

What consoles me a little for my impertinence in writing so many *I*'s and *me*'s is that I imagine many quite ordinary people in this nineteenth century are doing likewise. So that about 1880 there will be a flood of memoirs, and I, with my *I*'s and *me*'s will only be like everybody else.<sup>1</sup>

‘Who are *you*?’ said the Caterpillar.

[...] Alice replied, rather shyly, ‘I – I hardly know, Sir, just at present, – at least, I know who I *was* when I got up this morning, but I think I must have changed several times since then.’

‘What do you mean by that?’ Said the Caterpillar, sternly. ‘Explain yourself!’

‘I ca’n’t [*sic*] explain *myself*, I’m afraid Sir,’ said Alice, ‘because I’m not myself, you see.’<sup>2</sup>

If Stendhal could rightly predict the expansion of an autobiographical gesture by 1880, he probably did not imagine to what extent the situation at the beginning the 21<sup>st</sup> century would prove him right, especially after the invention of new *technologies of seeing*, as Brian Winston puts it, from photography, to cinematography, to television and video, to digital technologies, and, ultimately, to the Internet. And the emergence of so-called reality TV, programmes such as *Video Nation*, of blogs and video-logs (also known as *vlogs*) is only too emblematic of the ways in which *ordinary people* have followed suit.<sup>3</sup> In parallel, self-representation in visual arts has undergone a gradual shift from the marginal practices of the avant-gardes to a relatively more popular kind of cinema. The recent autobiographical comedy of French actor and director Guillaume Gallienne, *Les Garçons et Guillaume, à Table ! (My, Myself, and Mum*, France, 2013) is a good example in this respect.<sup>4</sup> However, if the concomitant explosion of self-expression as a social and artistic practice was what initially prompted my curiosity about self-representation in visual media, such sociological and historical considerations are not the object of this research.

Indeed, the point is not to focus on the reasons for this explosion, which are due to

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<sup>1</sup> Stendhal, *The Life of Henry Brulard* [1890], trans. by Jean Steward and B. C. J. G. Knight (London: The Merlin Press, 1958), p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Cleveland & New York: The World Publishing Company, 1946), p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> Video Nation is a programme created by Chris Mohr and Mandy Rose and launched by the BBC in 1993. It was aimed at encouraging people to film their daily lives as part of a sociological project.

<sup>4</sup> The film enjoyed great popular success in France with over two million spectators in the year of its release. Gallienne re-stages his youth and his complex relationship with his mother, whose role he also plays in addition to his own.

technological as much as sociological factors, but rather to reflect upon the aesthetic implications of this expansion in the context of cinema. In other words, the question that guides this research is how to understand contemporary self-representation in film, video, and visual arts beyond the classical definitions and distinctions in terms of genre, production modes, forms, or narrative structures.

Two ideas underpin this rationale: on the one hand, the distinction between classical categories of self-representation (such as autobiography, confessions, self-portrait, diary, travelogue, and so forth) has weakened. On the other, recurrent dichotomies such as that between experimental or alternative film-making modes and more conventional or commercial ones; between documentary and fiction; and finally, between cinema and other art forms, no longer hold. Far from suggesting that all distinctions are now blurred and that it all amounts to one and the same thing, I wish to argue that, as such, the traditional classification has become insufficient to describe the vast majority of contemporary production of self-representational films. And while there are exceptions, films that deal with self-representation tend to resort to a mosaic of narrative strategies and media.<sup>5</sup> Agnès Varda's *Les Glaneurs et la Glaneuse* (*The Gleaners and I*, France, 2000), to cite but one, could simultaneously be described as a diary, a self-portrait, a travelogue, and even an essay, but as it entails elements characteristic of each of these forms, how they are articulated with one another is a more productive question. In this sense, a transversal perspective would be more useful to understand the persistent fragmentation that affects not only previous categories of self-representation but also the aesthetic forms and narrative structures, and which is key to the understanding of self-representation. This is why the thesis defended here partakes of an endeavour to rethink the relevance of some categories of self-representation given their historical contingencies. Therefore, a thematic reflection, in want of a better expression, seemed more appropriate for this research as it transcends issues of genre and classification.

This work's main title is *Exposed Intimacy*, an oxymoron that aptly illustrates the process at work in self-representation in general and in the case studies in particular, as it refers to the 'display to the public gaze' of the 'most inward', the 'inmost thoughts or

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<sup>5</sup> Such exceptions would be experimental forms of self-portraiture, for instance, as will be discussed in Chapter 1.

feelings', of that which affects 'one's inmost self'.<sup>6</sup> As such, *exposed intimacy* brings to the fore the contrast between the private and the public, that is between the inside and the outside, the hidden and the visible, the closeted and the open. In this relational pattern in which space is paramount, intimacy is also associated with the domestic sphere to which women have too often been confined. Moreover, it does not only entail a psychological and emotional dimension but also a concrete and organic one, thus inevitably harking back to the human body and its related issues, namely sexuality and gender among others. Hence, it is not a coincidence that these themes are central in the works analysed here. While the relationship between the private and the public is not the object *per se* of this discussion, *exposed intimacy* provides a leading thread to the latter for it underlies the articulation between the authors' body and the outer space, especially that of the image. More precisely, the object of this research is to understand how the authors' self-inscription in the image feeds their reflection upon the medium, that is, how the act of self-representation consists in a *translation* of self into art. For this purpose, a selection of contemporary films and installations will be compared in thematic, aesthetic, and textual terms.

These case studies have been produced in France in the last thirty-five years by two film-makers and a visual artist, namely, in chronological order: Sophie Calle, Vincent Dieutre, and Mariana Otero.<sup>7</sup> Calle was born in 1953 and has been present in the French and international art scene since the late 1970s. She is usually described as a performer, photographer, writer, and more recently also as a video-maker, and is well known for drawing her subject matter from her personal life. Her works often consist in performances, which she eventually transforms into books and most importantly, into art installations composed of texts, photographs, objects, and sometimes moving images. In 1992, she also made a video in collaboration with Greg Shepard, her partner at the time, entitled *Double Blind (No Sex Last Night, USA/France, 1992)*. The latter as well as about fifteen of her performances/installations/exhibitions will be discussed more in detail (while other works may also be mentioned more briefly). Vincent Dieutre was born in 1960 and started to make films in the early nineties. Similarly to Calle, his work revolves around aspects of his personal life such as his homosexuality and a former heroin addiction, which he intertwines with poetic meditations on life, death,

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<sup>6</sup> Respective definitions of *to expose* and *intimacy*, *The Oxford English Dictionary* (hereafter referred to as *OED* in brackets directly in the text).

<sup>7</sup> For more biographical details, synopses of the films, and a description of the works, see appendix.

time, society, or politics. Aesthetic and formal experimentations are key to his work, which could be regarded as a series of self-fictional essays. Four of his films, as well as an installation made in 2011, are analysed in detail here. Mariana Otero was born in 1963 and, after graduating from the National Film School in Paris, she immediately began to work for television as a documentary-maker with a predilection for social and political issues, often to do with the living conditions of the underprivileged. *Histoire d'un secret* (*History of a Secret*, France, 2003; hereafter referred to as *Histoire*), the only of her films under discussion here, is also a singular case in her filmography as the only one that deals with an issue touching on her personal life. Interestingly, it also represents a pivotal moment in her career for not only did she shift from television to cinema thereafter, but her style also evolved: while the aesthetics of direct cinema characterise her first films in which she is strikingly invisible, her physical presence as a film-maker is more affirmed in subsequent works. If Sophie Calle enjoys the status of a 'superstar' in the international artistic and cultural scene, Dieutre and Otero remain relatively unknown to the wider audience in France, let alone in the United Kingdom where their films have never been distributed commercially. In this sense, this thesis also aims to contribute to the dissemination of their work. Other films will be mentioned and commented on throughout this thesis, and in particular one by Alina Marazzi *Un'ora Sola ti Vorrei* (*For one more hour with you*, Italy, 2002; hereafter referred to as *Un'ora*), of which certain aspects will be discussed in detail because it provides an interesting point of comparison at various stages of the discussion.

Several remarks regarding the case studies are in order. Firstly, about their similarities: they are relatively homogeneous in terms of geographic area, France, and historical period (they have been produced in the last twenty-five years). This was not only for pragmatic reasons of accessibility to the films and their related resources, but also to maintain a certain degree of cultural coherence so as to concentrate on their aesthetic dimension. However, it was a conscious choice not to focus on the national context (or European for that matter) in which they were made. Martine Beugnet has a point in arguing in favour of the importance of the cultural and historical background to embed the aesthetic study of a corpus,<sup>8</sup> but, while there is no denying the existence of national or cultural specificities in these films, this complex question requires a thorough reflection in sociological, historical, and political terms, which goes beyond

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<sup>8</sup> Martine Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensations: French Film and the Art of Transgression* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 11.

the scope of this thesis, and would be better developed with a broader range of examples – and not just three authors. Besides, ironically enough, most of the films and installations discussed here take the spectator beyond the national borders in one way or another, within Europe for Dieutre and all over the world for Calle, which perhaps only reflects the globalised world in which we are now living.

Secondly, regarding the differences of the body of works selected, they are eclectic insofar as their formal and narrative structures are concerned. In fact, they point more or less to three traditions identified by Laura Rascaroli in what she calls personal cinema: the one practised by avant-garde film-makers, that of auteur and art cinema, and, finally, the first-person documentary (even if such distinctions also have their own limitations).<sup>9</sup> Although Calle is a multimedial artist rather than an avant-garde film-maker, she builds the continuity between the performative art of the American underground and more contemporary forms of self-representation in visual arts. Navigating between documentary and fiction while showing great concern for the shifting status of cinema, Dieutre arguably lies in-between the first and the second strand, whereas Otero explicitly situates herself within the documentary tradition. While the point was not necessarily to have a comprehensive representation of all possible practices, beyond the practical reasons, as well as subjective and personal choices that led to the constitution of this corpus, the belief that a juxtaposition of very diverse works might be more effective also lay at the basis of this research, especially with regard to the textual analysis, which follows a thematic progression. In other words, the aim is to examine the extent to which these artists tackle similar issues despite very different aesthetic and narrative strategies, and what the implications of such differences and similarities might be.

Thirdly, regarding the dissymmetrical number of pieces by each author, in addition to the point just made, the main criterion for the constitution of the corpus was a search for thematic, rather than structural, coherence (it could perhaps also be regarded as a stance against the search for symmetry at all costs, as it were). Besides, the uneven proportion of works discussed reflects the place that self-representation takes within the respective oeuvre of each author. For instance, Calle's artistic career is the longest of the three and has almost entirely focused on the *mise en scène* of her persona, while Otero has only made one film about her personal life out of seven

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<sup>9</sup> Laura Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film* (London & New York: Wallflower Press, 2009), p. 106.

documentaries in total. Otero's case is symptomatic of an approach motivated by a socially pragmatic and therapeutic purpose: film-making is used here to tackle a specific social taboo and to enable an individual to come to terms with a difficult personal issue. Once the work of mourning has been performed, she can move on.

Fourthly, given that the emphasis is on cinema and the moving image, one may wonder why Calle is given such an important place. However, her multimodal strategy not only contributes to rethinking self-representation in the moving image, but is also extremely helpful in deconstructing the cinematographic apparatus. Her work consists of narrative structures, photographic images, *mises en scène* that set in motion the exhibition space, even if the movement emanates from the visitors and not necessarily from the artist, let alone from the images. This choice resolutely partakes of the intention to straddle the usual disciplinary boundaries, and in this respect, the concept of intermediality will be especially relevant. Moreover, and as a result of the latter point, cinema, which is the centre of gravity of this thesis, must be understood in a broad and encompassing sense, in keeping with Philippe Dubois's manifesto as he writes about the evolving status of cinema:

Yes, it is cinema, open and multiple, *expanded* cinema, taken out of its forms and frames. Cinema outside its theatre, outside its walls, outside 'the' device. [...] The film is no longer the criterion, nor is it the theatre, the single screen, the projection, nor even the spectators.

Yes, it is cinema, simply, it is today incredibly multiplied, diffracted, protean, emancipated, free.<sup>10</sup>

The pervading phenomenon of hybridisation also applies to the method employed because this research does not rely on a specific theoretical or critical framework but draws from a combination of theories and concepts borrowed from the fields of film, literature, semiotics, arts, philosophy, as well as, to a lesser extent, psychoanalysis and sociology, and ranges from structuralist approaches to the concepts of the Figural or intermediality, to name a few.

Chapter One, *Reflections on Categories of Self-representation*, lays the ground for many of the issues that will be developed in the following chapters. It weaves together a review of the relevant body of works and writing with a reflection upon some of the critical and theoretical issues at stake in self-representation, as they have been

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<sup>10</sup> Philippe Dubois, 'Introduction/Présentation' in *Oui, c'est du cinéma: Formes et espaces de l'image en mouvement*, ed. by Philippe Dubois, Lúcia Ramos Monteiro & Alessandro Bordina (Pasian di Prato: Campanotto Editore, 2009), p. 7 (my translation).

developed in relation to specific categories. In addition, it gives a prominent place to questions of terminology. Hence, four modes of self-representation are explored: the autobiography, the self-portrait, the diary, and the essay. From their literary and/or pictorial origins to their appropriation by the cinema, these categories are discussed in terms of definition and structure. The point is to show the ways in which they may contrast with, overlap, or complement one another.

The following chapters consist in a thematic and textual cross-examination of the case studies. Chapter Two, *Narrative Strategies*, focuses on the cinematic construction of the narrative devices employed by the artist and film-makers under discussion, ranging from levels of narration, point of view, or voice, to the use of fictional structures. Chapter Three, *(Dis)location*, deals with the metaphoric significations of spatial and geographical markers, on the premise that identity and self-representation are intrinsically related to space. Thus, objects such as the train, the car, or transitory spaces are examined as cinematic figures of movement and stillness that work towards an understanding of the films as heterotopias of the self. Metaphors of space also pervade the language of time, which is why temporality is envisaged from that angle in Chapter Four, *Topographies of the Past*. The quest that takes the authors/protagonists into their past takes the shape of a literal return to origins, while harking back to other fundamental issues such as the place of the archive, narrative structures of investigation, or the relationship between individual and collective memory as well as amnesia. To some extent, Chapters Three and Four are complementary and deal with absence, loss, and disappearance. By contrast, Chapter Five, *Emotions, Sensations, and the Body*, focuses on the sense of nowness in keeping with bodily presence and on the ways in which the very qualities of the image, as well as the cinematic media and formats, enhance materiality, as well as the physicality of emotions and sensations. Finally, Chapter Six, *Rituals*, outlines the recurrent patterns that emerge out of the case studies, and which are organised along three main figures of movement: passage, repetition, and transformation. Passage points to concepts such as intermediality or rites of passage while repetition encompasses figures of re-enactment, mimesis, or serialisation. As for transformation, it is bound to repetition like the other side of a Moebius strip, and refers to intertextuality, parody and play, as well as gender performativity and empowerment.

Overall, the Self is recurrently represented as split, unstable, and scattered, thus in perpetual in-betweenness, in transition. In this sense, what is also at stake here is to interrogate the way in which the Self negotiates its place and borders – its *intimacy* –

with the outer space of the Other. At the same time, self-representation is woven together with the film-makers' aesthetic and reflexive practice for, indeed, the specificities of the medium they use are intrinsic to the ways in which they stage themselves, so that self-representational films provide the space of *mise en abyme* par excellence of cinema itself.

## CHAPTER 1. REFLECTIONS ON CATEGORIES OF SELF-REPRESENTATION

I take the view that theories themselves are concealed narratives, that we should not be taken in by their pretention to be valid for all time; that the fact that you once invented a narrative is no excuse for not starting all over again, even if your narrative did look like an unshakeable system, that it is not right to be coherent and immutable, or in other words true to yourself, but that it is right to try to be true to your ability to tell the stories you think you hear in what others are doing and saying.<sup>1</sup>

### TERMINOLOGY

In March 1986, Adolphe Nysenholc organised an event around the theme of ‘cinema and autobiography’ at the Free University of Brussels. It combined a conference with the screening of films that were divided into six categories: self-portraits, (including portraits of friends and relatives); letters (including travelogues and private news); diaries; confessions; childhood memories; and finally, film-makers’ notebooks.<sup>2</sup> Raymond Bellour notes about this list that, interestingly enough, while the event’s title and bibliographical references used the word *autobiography*, the latter disappeared in the filmography in favour of the denominations just described.<sup>3</sup> Nysenholc’s classification leads to some confusion for it indifferently places on the same level formal or structural characteristics (self-portrait, letters, diaries, notebooks) and thematic ones (confessions, childhood memories). Still, this is a good illustration of the ways in which the critical debate on cinematographic self-representation gradually began to take shape, and shows how the term autobiography constituted a generic category before splitting into a diversity of looser strands. Indeed, if this was also the expression chosen by P. Adams Sitney in his seminal paper *Autobiography in Avant-garde Film*,<sup>4</sup> which is perhaps the first extended reflection on self-representation in the moving image, the boom of publications on self-representation of the last decades has emphasised a simultaneously encompassing and diffracted understanding of the topic, of which titles or expressions such as *The Subject of Documentary*, *The Personal*

<sup>1</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, ‘Lessons in Paganism’ [1977], in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. by Andrew Benjamin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 122-154 (p. 130).

<sup>2</sup> Proceedings published in *Revue Belge du Cinéma: L’écriture du JE au cinéma*, ed. by Adolphe Nysenholc, 19 (1987), p. 63.

<sup>3</sup> Raymond Bellour, ‘Self-Portraits’, in *Between-the-Images*, trans. by Allyn Hardyck (Zürich: JRP Ringier & Les Presses du Réel, 2012), pp. 318-393 (p. 328).

<sup>4</sup> P. Adams Sitney, ed., ‘Autobiography in Avant-garde Film’, in *The Avant-garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism* (New York: New York University Press, [1974] 1978), 199-246.

*Camera, The Cinema of Me, First-Person*, to name but a few, are representative.<sup>5</sup> Renov discusses a broad range of works but explicitly adopts the perspective of documentary film. Rascaroli provides an extremely thorough overview of modes of self-representation, but she keeps traditional categories whilst *personal camera* is too broad an expression to be adopted in the present context.<sup>6</sup> Alisa Lebow's emphasis on the first-person has the advantage of including the singular, *I*, and the plural, *we*, thereby pointing to a social and collective scope, but the expression first-person does not fully reflect the complex use of multiple shifters and voices by the self-referential authors, as we shall see here. In addition, the first person does not necessarily refer to the author. The remaining literature cited in this chapter tends to focus on specific categories of self-representation. Against this backdrop, the expression adopted in this thesis, *self-representation*, endeavours to encompass a broad variety of artistic self-referential practices, regardless of genre or disciplinary boundaries.

Before analysing such works in the following chapters, it will be useful to reassess some of the terminology that recurrently appears in the discussions on cinematographic self-representation, and which comes from pre-existing arts, where the critical and theoretical debates initially arose. Therefore, a cross-disciplinary approach will contribute to an understanding of what cinematographic forms of self-representation inherited or departed from. Four terms will be examined: autobiography, diary, essay, borrowed from literature, and self-portrait, borrowed from visual arts. In terms of formal and structural aspects, these four expressions appear to be the most recurrent, emblematic, and generic strands within the vast field of self-representation. Moreover, they point to specific theoretical and aesthetic dimensions of self-representation. After a brief overview of these terms' origins, autobiography will be discussed in the first instance given the generic value associated to it. Self-portraiture is also regarded as a generic term but while the former emphasises cinema's narrative modalities, the latter stresses its iconic and figurative dimension; after all, cinema lies at a crossroads between literature and visual arts. The diary will be examined in the third instance. Although, like autobiography, it originates in literature, and although the idea

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Alisa Lebow, *First Person Jewish* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Laura Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera, op. cit.*; Alisa Lebow, ed., *The Cinema of Me: The Self and Subjectivity in First Person Documentary* (London & New York: Wallflower Press, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> She has abandoned the denomination of autobiography, but the second section of her book looks at the diary film, the notebook film, and the self-portrait film. In any case, she deliberately uses the expression *personal camera* to include subjective modes of film-making that are not necessarily autobiographical or self-representational, such as the essay film. Laura Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera, op. cit.* p. 16.

of film diary probably emerged as early as that of film autobiography, especially through the film-making and self-reflexive writing of Jonas Mekas, the diary film has several characteristics in common with self-portraiture.<sup>7</sup> As a result, an organisation in terms of literary versus visual forms would not necessarily be more effective, not to mention the fact that the diary lacks the generic value of the first two. Finally, the essay tends to be defined as the subjective form par excellence that encompasses all others, even autobiography sometimes, which is why discussion of the essay film concludes the chapter.<sup>8</sup> This order reflects the intention to strike a balance between two opposite movements: from the general to the particular, on the one hand, and from self-evident to more subtle forms of self-expression, on the other.

## ORIGINS

Consensus reigns among scholars as to searching for the origins of autobiography, diary, and essay in literature, but they rarely agree on the precise roots. In his seminal essay, *Conditions and Limits of Autobiography*, Georges Gusdorf posits Augustine's *Confessions* (late 4<sup>th</sup> century) as the first autobiography and embeds this literary practice in Western tradition.<sup>9</sup> However, James Olney observes that it might as well have been dated back to Plato's *Seventh Epistle* (4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.).<sup>10</sup> Similarly, while Michel de Montaigne is overwhelmingly cited as the inventor of the essay, György Lukács goes as far back as Plato's dialogues, which are for him a form of essay, and Philip Lopate sees prefigurations of it in the works of Cicero and Seneca.<sup>11</sup> As for the diary, it is difficult to search for its precise origins given its private nature, but the epistolary and essayistic forms just mentioned could very well constitute a starting point; for Rascaroli, however, it began at the end of the Middle Ages and, like the self-portrait, developed during the

<sup>7</sup> Jonas Mekas, 'The Diary Film', in *The Avant-garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*, ed. by P. Adams Sitney, *op. cit.*, 190-198.

<sup>8</sup> Rascaroli made the reverse choice, whereby the category of essay film introduces her book, *The Personal Camera*, *op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> Georges Gusdorf, 'Conditions and Limits of Autobiography' [1956], in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. by James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 28-48 (p. 29).

<sup>10</sup> James Olney 'Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction' in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-27, p. 6. Olney provides a very thorough historical overview of the critical and historical writings on autobiography in literature, see pp. 7-19.

<sup>11</sup> György Lukács, 'On the Nature and Form of the Essay: A Letter to Leo Popper [October 1910]', in *Soul & Form*, trans. by Anna Bostock (New York: Columbia University Press, [1971] 1974), pp. 1-18 (p. 3); Philip Lopate, 'In Search of the Centaur: The Essay Film', *The Threepenny Review*, 48 (Winter, 1992), 19-22 (p. 19).

Renaissance.<sup>12</sup> In any case, and notwithstanding punctual occurrences in Antiquity, as a literary exercise, self-inscription essentially flourished during the Renaissance, a period of heightened awareness of the individual. Unsurprisingly, this is also the case for the self-portrait. As Omar Calabrese notes, the early stages of the Renaissance witnessed an evolution in the status of artists who wished to be considered as more than mere craftsmen.<sup>13</sup> In this context of emphasised subjectivity, the phrase ‘every painter paints himself’ (*Ogni dipintore dipinge se*) became a recurrent motto by the end of the Quattrocento, meaning that any work of art revealed the sensibility of its author.<sup>14</sup> However, technical factors also favoured the expansion of the self-portrait: this shift coincided with the period that saw the development of the glass mirror, widely believed to have laid the ‘technical and material foundations’ for the birth of the self-portrait, as Calabrese puts it; this is why, for Pascal Bonafoux, its iconic dimension is ‘in essence specular’.<sup>15</sup>

If the self-portrait developed during the Renaissance, it is nonetheless associated with myths of origins that also date back to Antiquity. As far as its specular dimension is concerned, the foundation myth is, of course, that of Narcissus who admires the reflection of his own image in the water.<sup>16</sup> Other tales are cited as prefigurations of pictorial arts. Pliny the Elder tells of a young woman in ancient Greece who, in order to preserve a trace of her lover’s presence before he embarked on a long journey, drew the contours of his shadow as it was projected onto the wall.<sup>17</sup> Elsewhere, it is reported that painting was introduced in Egypt by Gyges of Lydia, who ‘once saw his shadow cast by the light of a fire and instantly drew his own outline on the wall with a piece of

<sup>12</sup> Fostered by the expansion of printing. Laura Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera, op. cit.*, p. 115 & footnote no. 1, p. 200.

<sup>13</sup> As they felt inspired by a divine instance. Omar Calabrese, *Artists’ Self-portraits*, trans. by Marguerite Shore (New York; London: Abbeville Press Publishers, 2006), p. 284.

<sup>14</sup> The formula is attributed to Cosimo de’ Medici, himself quoted by Poliziano. See André Chastel, *Art et humanisme à Florence au temps de Laurent le Magnifique* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1982), p. 102.

<sup>15</sup> Omar Calabrese, *Artists’ Self-portraits, op. cit.*, p. 161; Pascal Bonafoux, ‘Moi ! Autoportraits du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle’ in *Moi, je par soi-même, l’autoportrait au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, exhibition catalogue, Musée du Luxembourg (Milano: Skira, 2004), pp. 13-41, p. 38.

<sup>16</sup> Omar Calabrese, *Artists’ Self-portraits, op. cit.*, p. 126. As a reminder, Narcissus, son of Cephissus and Liriope, discovers his face reflected in a well and is struck by his own beauty, but fails to recognise it as his own and eventually dies. After his death, a flower grows by the well and is named after him. See Ovid, ‘Narcissus and Echo’, *Metamorphoses*, Book 3: v. 339-510, trans. by David Raeburn (London: Penguin, 2004), pp. 109-116.

<sup>17</sup> She was the daughter of Butades, a potter of Sicyon, who then filled her drawing with clay and made a portrait in relief. Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History of Pliny*, Book XXXV, chapter 43 (12.), vol VI (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1857), p. 283.

charcoal'.<sup>18</sup> The first story refers to painting and drawing in general, whereas the second is more specifically related to self-portraiture, but both have in common the shadow and the projection as a basis, and thus stress another dimension of the self-portrait, as we shall see below.

In the light of this overview, the multiplicity of myths, texts, or narratives of origins is certainly disconcerting. Laura Marcus questions 'this critical desire for points of origin', in keeping with Olney who points out that this search for origins could be endless, depending on the definition attributed to each term. Indeed, he asks, can Plato's *Seventh Epistle* be considered an autobiography?<sup>19</sup>

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Olney's question points to the more general opposition between a broad and a narrower conception of autobiography. In the first case, it would encompass the diary, confessions, memoirs, and therefore, why not also Plato's letter? According to Philippe Lejeune, this inclusive definition appears as early as the nineteenth century: an autobiography is any text, regardless of its form, 'whose author had the secret or avowed intention to tell his life, expound his thoughts, or paint his feelings'.<sup>20</sup> In the second case, and in fact etymologically, autobiography is the 'account of a person's life given by himself or herself' (*OED*). As Michael Renov sums it up: 'The word "autobiography" is composed of three principal parts – "auto", "bio", and "graphy" – which make up the essential ingredients of this representational form: a self, a life, and a writing practice'.<sup>21</sup> For Lejeune, the existence of these two different interpretations is symptomatic of many of the problems of autobiography. However, the narrow definition is also problematic: for Olney, *autos* carries a series of unresolved questions as to the representation of the self, which can never be fully reflected. Moreover, he

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<sup>18</sup> Giorgio Vasari, drawing from Pliny, *The Lives of the Artists* [1550], trans. by George Bull (London: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 27.

<sup>19</sup> Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 2; James Olney 'Autobiography and the Cultural Moment', *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Philippe Lejeune, drawing from Louis Gustave Vapereau, *Dictionnaire Universel des Littératures* (1876), 'Cinéma et Autobiographie, Problèmes de Vocabulaire', *Revue Belge du Cinéma: L'Écriture du JE au Cinéma*, *op. cit.*, 7-13, p. 8 (my translation).

<sup>21</sup> Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. xii. Renov is drawing from James Olney who published an essay entitled 'Autos-Bios-Graphie: The Study of Autobiographical Literature', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 77 (1978) 113-123. Georges Gusdorf also published a book, which focuses on the word's etymology: *Auto-bio-graphie* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1991).

refutes the idea that *bios* in autobiography simply points to the ‘course of a lifetime’. Finally, about *graphein*, he reminds us of the old naive assumption whereby the autobiographical text could constitute an ‘objective historical account’ of the author’s life.<sup>22</sup> In other words, the text cannot achieve a comprehensive representation of the author’s life, since the end of the book does not correspond to his/her death but merely to the end of the writing process. As a result, ‘the subject of autobiography produces more questions than answers, more doubts by far (even of its existence) than certainties’.<sup>23</sup> Before him, and as the title of his essay implies, Georges Gusdorf had already toned down the assertive stance hitherto associated with a practice reserved to the great men who would focus on their public career at the dawn of their lives.<sup>24</sup>

#### AUTO-

For Gusdorf, this traditional conception changed radically when autobiography turned to the private and intimate, thus becoming an introspective exercise of self-discovery and self-consciousness, which harks back to the Christian tradition of confession, hence the positing of Augustine’s *Confessions* as a starting point.<sup>25</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Confessions* partake of a similar spiritual endeavour: if he addresses the reader at first sight, he submits his confession to God in the highest instance.<sup>26</sup> Later, this self-awareness shifted from the spiritual to the psychological realm, as Gusdorf rightly acknowledges the importance of Jacques Lacan’s ground-breaking work on the mirror phase based on the myth of Narcissus.<sup>27</sup> As a reminder, this is the moment during which the child recognises its image as its own body. For Lacan, the image is perceived as ‘better’ because it reflects the full body. The mirror thus sends back a more *complete* image, which becomes the ‘ideal I’ and in which the subject projects him or herself.<sup>28</sup> The mirror phase is constitutive of the conception of the self as intrinsically

<sup>22</sup> James Olney ‘Autobiography and the Cultural Moment’, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*; see also Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses*, *op. cit.* pp. 56-58.

<sup>24</sup> Georges Gusdorf, ‘Conditions and Limits of Autobiography’ pp. 28 & 36; see also Laura Marcus’s *Auto/biographical Discourses*, *op. cit.*, Chapter 2.

<sup>25</sup> Georges Gusdorf, ‘Conditions and Limits of Autobiography’, *op. cit.*, pp. 33 & 37.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Let the trumpet of judgement sound when it will, I will present myself with this book in my hand before the Supreme Judge. I will say boldly: ‘Here is what I have done, what I have thought, what I was [...]’. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions*, trans. by Angela Scholar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> Georges Gusdorf, ‘Conditions and Limits of Autobiography’, *op. cit.*, p. 32. About this shift, see also Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses*, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

<sup>28</sup> Jacques Lacan, ‘The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I’ [1966], *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977), p. 1-7.

split, which is fundamental to the understanding of self-representation as the exposure or expression of an unresolved crisis. In parallel, there was for Olney ‘a shift of attention from *bios* to *autos* – from the life to the self – [...] largely responsible for opening things up and turning them in a philosophical, psychological and literary direction’.<sup>29</sup> As a result, autobiography no longer focused on one’s deeds but rather on one’s identity in an approach that is now, by the same token, much more uncertain: the *autos* has ceased to be taken as ‘perfectly neutral’ and has become a site of instability.<sup>30</sup>

Authors often express this by using different shifters to mark the distinct positions of the self.<sup>31</sup> As Philippe Lejeune argues, ‘an author is not a person. He is a person who writes and publishes’.<sup>32</sup> This stance clearly alludes to Arthur Rimbaud’s famous phrase: ‘*I* is an *other*’, which not only illustrates the dichotomy between the living and the writing or filming subject, but also suggests the possibility for *I* to designate any person at a given moment.<sup>33</sup> As Émile Benveniste demonstrated, shifters (especially the first and second pronouns) are deictic, that is, empty signs that only have a referent in a situation of enunciation.<sup>34</sup> Many authors resort to the second person to establish a virtual dialogue between the self and its alter ego, as in Nathalie Sarraute’s *Childhood*, in which she stages an imaginary dialogue between her *living* and her *writing* self and discusses her own authorial intentions or the exactitude of her memories.<sup>35</sup> The first person is all the more problematic in that, as Lejeune points out, *I* could also designate the character-narrator of a fiction while for Roland Barthes, it should also refer to the reader in front of the text.<sup>36</sup> As a result, first-person narration alone seems insufficient to clearly establish the autobiographical register. This is why Lejeune posits the necessary conflation between author, narrator, and protagonist, which takes place through the identification of the author by way of his/her name and signature:

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<sup>29</sup> James Olney, ‘Autobiography and the Cultural Moment’, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> The role of shifters is analysed in detail in the next chapter.

<sup>32</sup> Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, ed. by Paul John Eakin, trans. by Katherine Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 11.

<sup>33</sup> Arthur Rimbaud, ‘Letter to Georges Izambard’ [13 May 1971], *Complete Works*, trans. by Paul Schmidt (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1976), p. 100.

<sup>34</sup> Émile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics* [1966], trans. by Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1971), pp. 205-222.

<sup>35</sup> Nathalie Sarraute, *Childhood*, trans. by Barbara Wright (London: John Calder, 1984), p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, *op. cit.*, p. 8; Roland Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’ [1968], in *Image, Music, Text*, Essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath, 5<sup>th</sup> edn (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 142-148.

The entire existence of the person we call the *author* is summed up by his name: the only mark in the text of an unquestionable world-beyond the text, referring to a real person, which requires that we thus attribute to him, in the final analysis, the responsibility for the production of the whole written text.<sup>37</sup>

The reader therefore recognises the author behind the text, even if the latter does not necessarily opt for first-person narration, hence the existence of an autobiographical pact between author and reader, which ‘is the affirmation in the text of this identity, referring back in the last analysis to the *name* of the author on the cover’, the identity being that of the name (author-narrator-character).<sup>38</sup>

In the context of the moving image, the split of the self obviously takes place in visual terms. To some extent, the trinity *author*, *narrator*, *character* can be thought of in the following way: the source of the camera’s gaze, the voice (often a voice over), the presence of the film-maker onscreen. In any case, in literature and in cinema, this understanding between author and reader/viewer also partakes of what Lejeune calls the ‘referential pact’, that is, the ‘determining role of reference in the recognition of any text as an autobiography [...]’, as Paul John Eakin puts it.<sup>39</sup> Of course, the name on the cover may be a pseudonym or a fake name as in *David Holzman’s Diaries* (Jim McBride, USA, 1967), but works like this play at parodying or perverting this very pact, thereby confirming its referential value. For Paul de Man, however, Lejeune’s referential pact points to an epistemological contradiction in that the reader is expected to become the judge of authenticity, which confers upon him/her a transcendental position; but the specular relation between author and reader has not been overcome, it has only been displaced.<sup>40</sup> For Eakin, this means that autobiography is trapped in the tension between the aspiration ‘to move beyond its own text’ and the striving after a ‘knowledge of the self and the world’.<sup>41</sup> Hence the idea suggested earlier of self-representation as the recurrent expression of an unresolved (and unresolvable) crisis.

-BIO-

Autobiography is generally regarded as an attempt to answer the question *What*

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<sup>37</sup> Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, *op. cit.* p. 11.

<sup>38</sup> *Id.*, p. 14.

<sup>39</sup> *Id.*, p. 22; Paul John Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography, Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 184.

<sup>40</sup> Paul de Man, ‘Autobiography as De-facement’, *MLN*, 94: 5, (December, 1979), 919-930, pp. 922-923.

<sup>41</sup> Paul John Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

*have I done?*<sup>42</sup> In terms of temporality, this means that the autobiographer looks back into time to tell the story of his/her life:

The author of an autobiography exposes the novel of his life, that is, the meaning that he recognises in it, in a retrospection that does not go from past to present, but from present to past, invocation of memory and revocation altogether, lyrical alchemy.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, for Gusdorf, it is a retrospective – and therefore diachronic – narrative based on memory reconstruction. For P. Adams Sitney, it is autobiography's diachronic structure that makes it an adequate category to delineate the temporal dimension present in the films he analyses.<sup>44</sup> More precisely, he expounds the ways in which avant-garde film developed cinematic strategies to relate 'the moments of shooting and editing to the diachronic continuity of the film-maker's life'.<sup>45</sup> Although he writes specifically about the American avant-garde, this issue encompasses all cinematic forms of self-representation (with the exception perhaps of so-called autobiographical fictions). As he notes, one possibility is to 'assemble all of the filmed images of [the film-maker's] past, by and large home movies, and use them as the foundation-blocks of his film'.<sup>46</sup> As a result, whereas the literary autobiography may rely on the past tense, here, ellipse, photographs, and old footage play a major role to evoke the past. For instance, in *Film Portrait* (Jerome Hill, USA, 1972), the film-maker goes back in time, up to 1905, the year of his birth, by showing photographs of himself in reverse chronological order. For Sitney, the film is 'not reversing time', as Hill ironically posits in the voice over comment, 'but rhythmically presenting a series of snapshots [...] so as to undo a cliché of growth'.<sup>47</sup>

In addition, in cinema, retrospection and expression of the past are also conveyed by language, which often takes the shape of voice over narration.<sup>48</sup> For example, in *Film Portrait*, Hill's voice over is essential to the film's diachronic narrative structure as he compares the 'me that am' in a photogram of himself shaving, to the 'me that was' in

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<sup>42</sup> According to Michel Beaujour, this goes back to Augustine's *Confessions*. See *Poetics of the Literary Self-portrait*, trans. by Yara Milos (New York: New York University Press, 1991), p. 3. See also Rousseau's declaration, quoted in footnote no. 26.

<sup>43</sup> Georges Gusdorf, *auto-bio-graphie*, *op. cit.*, p. 474 (my translation).

<sup>44</sup> Sitney looks at works by Jerome Hill, Stan Brakhage, Hollis Frampton, George Landow, and James Broughton. P. Adams Sitney, 'Autobiography in Avant-garde Film', *op. cit.*

<sup>45</sup> *Id.*, p. 200.

<sup>46</sup> *Id.*, p. 201.

<sup>47</sup> *Id.*, p. 204.

<sup>48</sup> The role of the voice over is examined in the next chapter.

old photographs, and even to the ‘me that will be’ in a sequence parodying him as a future old man. This example also demonstrates the central role of shifters in expressing different temporalities for they also answer the need to acknowledge the split of identity in time: to some extent, the self in the present is always distinct from the self in the past or in the future, which ultimately amounts to an *other*, that is, a ‘he’, in keeping with Roland Barthes’s own use of the third person in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*.<sup>49</sup>

The traditional conception of autobiography as diachronic is closely interconnected to the idea of total work. Gusdorf compares the painter’s self-portrait to the writer’s autobiography to posit that the first only captures an instant of its exterior appearance while the latter ‘strains towards a total and coherent expression of his entire destiny’.<sup>50</sup> In other words, he associates autobiography with duration and the self-portrait with instantaneity. Given the paramount role of editing, this difference tends to be undermined in cinema, which is why Bellour argues that, by contrast with literature, autobiography in cinema is necessarily fragmentary and limited.<sup>51</sup> However, totality is as utopic in literature as in cinema for the autobiographer ‘*strains towards a total*’ expression, yet never seems to achieve it. Moreover, as de Man puts it:

the interest of autobiography [...] is not that it reveals reliable self-knowledge – it does not – but that it demonstrates in a striking way *the impossibility of closure and of totalization* (that is the impossibility of coming into being) of all textual systems made up of tropological substitutions.<sup>52</sup>

By extension, de Man’s stance also challenges the apparent simplicity of a diachronic structure in autobiography, which would suggest that past and present are totally distinct from one another, as if the autobiographer looked back into the past, as a clearly delimited phase, from a remote view-point set in the present. In reality, different temporalities are woven together so that autobiography is a continuous process, hence the ‘impossibility of closure and totalization’ posited by de Man. As a result, the difference between traditional and modern conceptions of autobiography lies perhaps in the degree to which the authors realise and acknowledge this aporia and in the way in which this shapes their work. This means that autobiography as a total work was always an illusion or an *ideal* towards which the author was striving. In this sense,

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<sup>49</sup> *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* [1975], trans. by Richard Howard (London and Basingstoke: MacMillan 1977).

<sup>50</sup> Georges Gusdorf, ‘Conditions and Limits of Autobiography’, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>51</sup> Raymond Bellour, ‘Self-Portraits’, *op. cit.*, p. 336.

<sup>52</sup> Paul de Man, ‘Autobiography as De-facement’, *op. cit.*, p. 922 (my emphasis).

cinematographic autobiography is not radically different from the literary one but, by contrast, because of its inherent composite structure, acknowledges more visibly and perhaps more effectively the utopic desire for totalization.

#### -GRAPHY

The final etymological root of autobiography, *graphein*, refers to the writing practice and points to the process of construction and invention of the self, which ties in with the argument just made. If, according to Olney, *graphein* was neglected by literary critics up until modern studies of autobiography, this dimension is particularly central in cinema.<sup>53</sup> In the example of Hill's *Film Portrait*, as in many other works, the voice over also functions as a meta-narrative upon the film-making process, and stresses precisely this aspect: by playing with different temporal *me*'s, Hill also underscores the illusory representation of a continuous present in the filmic image, showing that the self in the present can only last a single frame and that the self in the past is the result of a reconstruction. Sitney also describes how, in *Scenes from under Childhood* (US, 1967-1970), Stan Brakhage brings together images of his children and reminiscences of his own childhood, thus building another kind of diachronic structure. The film puts a strong emphasis on the memory process, which means for Sitney that it 'makes no claims to represent the facts of [Brakhage's] life; instead it reproduces the structures of his experience as he remembers them'.<sup>54</sup> This resonates strongly with a point made by Gusdorf:

Autobiography is not simple repetition of the past as it was, for recollection brings us not the past itself but only the presence in spirit of a world forever gone. Recapitulation of a life lived [...] reveals no more than a ghostly image of that life, *already far distant, and doubtless incomplete, distorted furthermore* by the fact that the man who remembers his past has not been for a long time the same being, the child or adolescent, who lived that past.<sup>55</sup>

In addition, 'the image in the mirror does not only duplicate the scene but adds to it as a new dimension a distancing perspective'; as a result, autobiography is 'the attempt and the drama of a man *struggling to reassemble himself in his own likeness* at a certain

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<sup>53</sup> James Olney 'Autos-Bios-Grapphein', *op. cit.*, pp. 115-116.

<sup>54</sup> P. Adams Sitney, 'Autobiography in Avant-garde Film', *op. cit.*, p. 209.

<sup>55</sup> Georges Gusdorf, 'Conditions and Limits of Autobiography', *op. cit.*, p. 38 (my emphasis).

moment of his history'.<sup>56</sup> Gusdorf argues further that 'an autobiography worthy of the name is the dream of a life rather than its objective history',<sup>57</sup> which sums up the process at work in Brakhage's juxtaposition of images of his children with his own childhood as an attempt to metaphorically mirror his experience.

Reflecting on the role of language in the graphological dimension of autobiography, Eakin wonders if the self comes into being through language (that of autobiography for that matter) or if it is already present and simply made visible through the act of self-inscription. Although this question cannot be answered, he posits that 'the autobiographical act functions symbolically as a second acquisition of language'.<sup>58</sup> In the moving image, this applies very well to some of the examples cited, whereby the story of the film-maker's life and his/her acquisition of the cinematic language, as it were, are so closely intertwined that the act of self-inscription onscreen necessarily shows the film-maker at work. Furthermore, the person often disappears behind the author. Hence the relevance of the graphological dimension, which, for Michael Renov, 'must remain the recurrent focal point for an examination of the filmic, electronic or digital autobiography. Self-inscription is necessarily constituted through its signifying practices'.<sup>59</sup> To come back to Hill's *Film Portrait*, it is indeed a portrait of the film-maker as much as of cinema. As he points out, being born in 1905, he grew up almost at the same time as this new art form. The film sketches the evolution of the different filming techniques as they were being developed throughout the years, while also showing Hill's own learning process of making films through experimentation. Similarly, Raymond Depardon's *Les Années Décliv* (*The Decliv Years*, 1983, France) begins at his birth with a photograph of his family's farm, but quickly shifts onto his formative years as a photographer and film-maker; and the list of examples could go on. These tend to undermine Gusdorf's point that autobiography focuses on the intimate. However, such films are perhaps best described as self-portraits.

In any case, the act of writing, photographing, or filming in these instances, also has a profound effect on the constitution of the self in representation. In this sense, as far as self-invention is concerned, autobiography raises an interesting point as to the status of the author. While Barthes claimed that the author is dead and it is no longer he

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<sup>56</sup> Georges Gusdorf, 'Conditions and Limits of Autobiography', p. 43 (my emphasis).

<sup>57</sup> Georges Gusdorf, *auto-bio-graphie*, *op. cit.*, p. 474 (my translation).

<sup>58</sup> Paul John Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography*, *op. cit.* (see in particular Chapter 4, pp. 181-278), p. 237.

<sup>59</sup> Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

who *invents* the text (the author only *writes* the text),<sup>60</sup> the debate on autobiography, as it is presented by Eakin, reverses the interrogation to ask if the autobiographical text invents not only the author but also the self. As de Man boldly wonders:

We assume that life *produces* the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer *does* is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined, in all aspects, by the resources of his medium?<sup>61</sup>

De Man's question points in two directions: referentiality as a precondition of autobiography and the determining role of the medium. Regarding the first issue, he posits that the referent no longer determines the figure while autobiography, which necessarily produces a certain degree of fiction, develops its own 'referential productivity'.<sup>62</sup> In this respect, Gusdorf tells an illustrative anecdote: in his evocation of his birthplace, French poet Alphonse de Lamartine mentions a vine-tree that was not there in reality, so his mother allegedly had one planted afterwards so as to 'reconcile poetry and truth'; for Gusdorf, this is the sign that the 'truth of facts is subordinate to the truth of the man'.<sup>63</sup> In a comparable way, Sophie Calle decided to artistically exploit mistakes and errors spotted in articles and books written about her.<sup>64</sup> As a result, referentiality somehow becomes fictional, and fiction becomes referential. This goes against the narrower understanding of autobiography whereby truth is a prerequisite, as Elizabeth W. Bruss claimed in her famous essay on autobiography in cinema.<sup>65</sup> Her paper has already been widely commented on and criticised by Raymond Bellour, Michael Renov, as well as Lejeune, among others, and will therefore not be tackled

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<sup>60</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author' *op. cit.*, p. 145.

<sup>61</sup> Paul de Man, 'Autobiography as De-facement', *op. cit.*, p. 920.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> The poem in question is *La Vigne et la maison* (1857). Gusdorf, 'Conditions and Limits of Autobiography', *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>64</sup> Erwan Desplanques & Virginie Félix, 'L'entretien: Sophie Calle', *Télérama*, 2994 (2-8 June 2007), 20-24, p. 24.

<sup>65</sup> Elizabeth W. Bruss, 'Eye for I: Making and Unmaking Autobiography in Film', in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, *op. cit.*, pp. 296-320 (p. 300 & pp. 304-309).

again here.<sup>66</sup> The second point mentioned by de Man is particularly relevant to cinema, as he wonders about the degree to which self-representation is conditioned by the technical constraints imposed by the medium. Indeed, and as we shall see in the following chapters, the filming equipment conditions not only the structure of Sophie Calle and Greg Shepard's film, *Double Blind*, but even the couple's journey. Similarly for Mariana Otero, the material available to her (especially her mother's paintings) is determinant not only for the film about her mother but also for her subsequent relation to her memory of the latter.

De Man's use of the term self-portraiture is interesting. It suggests that autobiography and self-portraiture are interconnected, which is a truism in the context of the moving image. Yet more importantly, it suggests that the latter is necessarily associated with the medial and technical modalities of autobiography, for instance when it comes to the specular dimension of self-representation, however only metaphorically. This intertwining might also explain the relative confusion in the resort to terms and expressions, of which Sitney's case is characteristic. Although a sense of narrative continuity runs to a varying degree across the films he discusses, these are much more elliptic, metaphoric, and fragmentary than he seems to imply. As already mentioned, some of them would be best described as self-portraits and Sitney himself refers to Hill's *Film Portrait* as a self-portrait, but he does so without explaining the distinction with autobiography.<sup>67</sup> This denotes once again the extent to which autobiography has tended to be regarded as a generic category within which the self-portrait would constitute one among other forms. Sitney seems less concerned with terminology than with the characteristics of the films, perhaps because, at the time of his writing, the 1970s, the critical debate on self-representation was only beginning to emerge within film studies. In this sense, he was obviously a pioneer.

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<sup>66</sup> Philippe Lejeune, 'Cinéma et autobiographie, problèmes de vocabulaire', *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10; Raymond Bellour, 'Self-Portraits', *op. cit.*, pp. 329-332; Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, *op. cit.*, pp. 230-232. For her, autobiography *as we have known it* is impossible in cinema. By and large, what is objected to in her argument is the inadequacy of analytic tools designed for the study of literary forms when directly applied to film, and the fact that she based her rationale on autobiographical fictions whilst she ignored (or had no knowledge of) the broad existing body of autobiographical cinema (emerging at the time within experimental circuits).

<sup>67</sup> 'Film Portrait is a self-portrait on film, and a portrait of the self of film.' P. Adams Sitney, 'Autobiography in Avant-garde Film', *op. cit.*, p. 207.

## SELF-PORTRAIT

However, and although the self-portrait is ‘autobiographical in nature’, it is also regarded as the antinomy of autobiography.<sup>68</sup> For Michel Beaujour, who draws from Philippe Lejeune, the former differentiates itself from the latter through the ‘absence of a sustained narrative’.<sup>69</sup> Thus, while autobiography is very often articulated around a chronological structure, the self-portrait lies on the side of ‘the *analogical*, the *metaphorical*, or the *poetic* text’.<sup>70</sup> It does not mean that this form, whether literary, cinematic, or even pictorial, cannot be narrative, but its narration is marked by fragmentation and is subordinated ‘to a *logical* deployment, a collation or patching together, of elements under heads that, for the time being, we shall call “thematic”’; and finally, if autobiography tells *what I have done*, by contrast, the self-portrait attempts to reveal *who I am*.<sup>71</sup> Of course, its principle of analogy partakes of a more general tradition of visual arts, and in this sense, the self-portrait also endeavours, to some extent, to show *what I look like*.

### BETWEEN ICON AND INDEX

To come back to the self-portrait’s foundational myths, while Narcissus harks back to the specular image, the respective tales of Butades’s daughter and Gyges are linked to the shadow, the projection, and the trace, that is, in semiotic terms, to the index. This echoes the etymological difference emphasised by Calabrese between the Latin roots *pro-traho* (from the verb *protrahere*) on which the word *portrait* is based, and *ri-traho*, which gave its equivalent in Italian: *ritratto*. For Calabrese, the former means to draw *in place of something else*, in the sense of keeping a trace of the object gone, while the latter signifies to draw *again*, thus generating a copy of the represented object, as is the case with a mirror:

The two terms – and it is important to note that these are coexisting terms – stress two aspects, two points of view, two concepts that will remain binary throughout the history of this artistic genre. There is the idea of the

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<sup>68</sup> Namely by Bellour and Beaujour, from whom the former borrows the idea and definition of the self-portrait. Raymond Bellour ‘Self-Portraits’, *op. cit.*, pp. 336-337.

<sup>69</sup> *Id.*, p. 337.

<sup>70</sup> Michel Beaujour, *Poetics of the Literary Self-portrait*, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

convention and the idea of imitation, an interest in canon and abstract rule, and in the referential nature of the image.<sup>72</sup>

It could even be argued that *pro-traho* elicits absence and *ri-traho* presence, enhanced by the repetition process. These are the two different, but coexisting, dimensions at stake in portraiture in general and self-portraiture in particular, that is, a representation of the subject, not only as icon, but also as physical trace and index. And this not only applies to the photographic image but also to painting, as shall be discussed in the following chapters, through the example of Mariana Otero's *Histoire d'un secret*.

### THE SELF-PORTRAIT AS THE ESSENCE OF ART

To come back to Narcissus, Leon Battista Alberti goes as far as to hail him as the inventor of painting:

[...] I say among my friends that Narcissus who was changed into a flower, according to the poets, was the inventor of painting. Since painting is already the flower of every art, the story of Narcissus is most to the point. What else can you call painting but a similar embracing with art of what is presented on the surface of the water in the fountain?<sup>73</sup>

In keeping with this, in Lejeune's formulation, the self-portrait is an 'allegory of art itself', in the sense that the self-representation of man and woman has a metonymic value as 'signs of mankind'.<sup>74</sup> It also ties in with the question underpinning the self-portrait: 'who am I?', which points to a quest for the *very essence of the self*, as opposed to the autobiographical project of narrating the events of one's life. As reductive as this opposition may be, given that autobiography also entails an introspective dimension, this issue becomes more explicit in self-portraiture because of the paramount significance of the mirror: introspection is here literal. Therefore, if subjectivity is inevitably present in any work of art, it applies all the more so to self-representation, so that the self-portrait epitomises the quintessence of this exteriorisation of subjectivity, as its most manifest and radical expression. Yet, there is perhaps another reason for positing the self-portrait as the essence of art, which is less of a metaphoric than of a technical and aesthetic order.

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<sup>72</sup> Omar Calabrese, *Artists' Self-portraits*, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

<sup>73</sup> Leon Battista Alberti, *On painting* [1435], trans. by John R. Spencer, rev. edn (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 64.

<sup>74</sup> Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

## THE SUBJECT OF THE SELF-PORTRAIT IS ART

For Bonafoux, ‘the psychological commentary on a self-portrait is irrelevant’ because what painters are interrogating is ‘painting, its mystery, and its *raison d’être*’; hence, ‘to paint oneself is (perhaps) to paint what is at stake in painting’.<sup>75</sup> Bonafoux explains this through the regularity with which artists depict themselves at work, that is as painters. In the same vein, Rascaroli puts forward pragmatic motives in that ‘the self-portrait was traditionally used as a tool to present and to demonstrate one’s skills to potential patrons’.<sup>76</sup> As such, it provided artists with a space to experiment more freely once they used themselves as a model. This is perhaps why, for Bonafoux, ‘[t]he portraits of Rembrandt by Rembrandt [are] variations of what he attempts, evidence of what he risks [...]. The portraits of Vincent Van Gogh by Vincent Van Gogh [...] prove that his work is his life, that it is not his life that is his work.’<sup>77</sup> The self-portrait is therefore an expression of the artists’ inner quest for the meaning of their work and for the very existence of art.

Despite the time that has elapsed since Rembrandt’s era, Bonafoux’s statement equally applies to photography, film, and video. Indeed, the revelation of the apparatus in the image is constant and recurrently plays with mirror and shadow devices: from photography, as in Ilse Bing’s *Self-Portrait in Mirrors* (1931, fig. 1) or André Kertész’s *Self-Portrait* (1927, fig. 2), to cinema, as in Hill and Depardon’s films, mentioned above, or as in the opening sequence of *JLG/JLG: Autoportrait de Décembre* (Jean-Luc Godard, France/Switzerland, 1994), in which we shift from Godard’s shadow holding a camera to a portrait of him as a child (fig. 3). This suggests that the real subject of the self-portrait is perhaps art in general, and cinema in particular in the present context, as Muriel Tinel argues.<sup>78</sup> For her, the cinematographic self-portrait is a ‘representation of the artist by himself, at a given moment of his work, when arises for him the question: what about me in the cinema now, and what about cinema for me now?’<sup>79</sup> Thus, just as in the painted self-portrait, the artist’s self-representation is only significant insofar as it enables him/her to reflect upon his/her art. This is why in *Chantal Akerman par Chantal Akerman*, (France, 1997), after a brief prologue in which the film-maker expounds the

<sup>75</sup> Pascal Bonafoux, ‘Moi! Autoportraits du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle’, *op. cit.*, p. 21 (my translation).

<sup>76</sup> Laura Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera*, *op. cit.*, p.176.

<sup>77</sup> Pascal Bonafoux, ‘Moi! Autoportraits du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle’, *op. cit.*, p. 20 (my translation).

<sup>78</sup> See Muriel Tinel, *L’autoportrait cinématographique* (unpublished doctoral thesis, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales – Paris, 2004).

<sup>79</sup> Muriel Tinel, ‘L’autoportrait du cinéaste au travail’, *ETC Revue de l’Art Actuel: Portrait de Soi*, 68 (December 2004-February 2005), 25-28, p. 26 (my translation).

different ways in which she approached the idea of a self-portrait (or failed to do so), the rest of the film consists of a selection of extracts from her previous works. By showing her films, Akerman is showing herself, or rather, she defines herself through her work, that is as a film-maker, in the same way as Otero states that ‘without her films [she is] nothing’.<sup>80</sup>



Fig. 1: Ilse Bing, *Self-Portrait in Mirrors*, 1931



Fig. 2: André Kertész, *Self-Portrait*, 1927

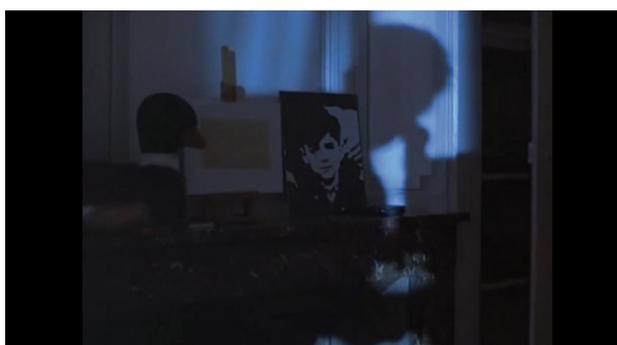


Fig. 3: *JLG/JLG, Autoportrait de décembre* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1994)

Tinel examines experimental self-portraits, in which the film-makers literally deconstruct and reconstruct the device, using cardboard, light bulbs, manipulating the camera lenses, and so forth, so as to ‘test the principles of cinema (frame and projection)’ (fig. 4).<sup>81</sup> For Tinel, although this is not necessarily the rule, the strong connection between technical experimentation and the self-portrait is a sign that the latter

slips into or imposes itself in the places where a work tool is invented, since to experiment using one’s own figure constitutes at once a signing act as

<sup>80</sup> Rebecca Manzoni, ‘Interview with Mariana Otero’, *Eclectik*, broadcast programme, France Inter, 20 March 2011, <[http://sites.radiofrance.fr/franceinter/em/eclectik\\_dim/index.php?id=101823](http://sites.radiofrance.fr/franceinter/em/eclectik_dim/index.php?id=101823)> [Accessed: 20 March 2011].

<sup>81</sup> Muriel Tinel, ‘Vidéo-sténopé de Jean-François Reverdy ou l’expérience de l’autoportrait’, *Exploding: Revue d’analyse de l’expérimentation cinématographique*, n. 10+1, (April, 2006), 196-199, pp. 198-199.

well as the possibility to multiply experiences on a subject who is always present, and to preserve a certain intimacy during the tests.<sup>82</sup>

Consequently, the medium is paramount in the self-portrait, which provides a space for aesthetic and technical experimentation, hence the prominent place that this mode occupies in the circuit of experimental film and video.



**Fig. 4: Vidéo-sténopé: Naissance d'une image (Jean-François Reverdy, 2003)**

#### *MEDIUM SPECIFICITY: THE CASE OF VIDEO*

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, video was endowed with a specificity that made it the medium par excellence for self-portraiture and the recording of live performances. Developed in the 1950s, video technology was commercialised as portable equipment in the 1960s and was immediately adopted by artists who sought emancipation from more traditional art forms. For Catherine Elwes, these immediately reclaimed video as a 'creative medium capable of challenging the military, political, and commercial interests from which it sprang', while the simultaneity of the recording and viewing processes meant that the artist could get 'instant feedback' and no longer needed to wait for the film to return from the laboratory.<sup>83</sup> Finally, the instantaneous projection on the monitor allowed the artists to use the screen as a mirror, as is still the case now with digital technology, of course.

In a famous article, Rosalind Krauss discusses video in similar terms and posits that narcissism is the medium of video: indeed, it is 'endemic to works of video' because the majority of such works made during that period uses the human body as the main instrument (that of the artist in the case of video tapes, or that of the viewer in the

<sup>82</sup> Muriel Tinel, 'Vidéo-sténopé de Jean-François Reverdy ou l'expérience de l'autoportrait', *op. cit.*, p. 199.

<sup>83</sup> Catherine Elwes, *Video Art: A Guided Tour* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), pp. 4 & 16.

case of installations).<sup>84</sup> Although narcissism, as a psychological condition, is generally associated with the subject of art, rather than its medium, it is impossible for Krauss to grasp video in mere technological terms, that is, ‘separate from the artist’s own being’ since here, the ‘human psyche is used as a conduit’.<sup>85</sup> Her argument ties in with the various meanings of the word *medium*, which can also apply to a person, as the work of Sophie Calle shall illustrate. Moreover, video’s capacity to simultaneously record and transmit an image places the body at the centre ‘between two machines that are the opening and closing of a parenthesis’, one being the camera and the other the ‘monitor, which re-projects the performer’s image with the immediacy of a mirror’.<sup>86</sup> This partakes of a process of ‘self-encapsulation’ that not only allows the artist to work alone, but also cuts the subject from the outside world.<sup>87</sup> For instance in *Boomerang* (Richard Serra, US, 1974), Nancy Holt is talking while her own words are simultaneously retransmitted to her through headphones (with a slight delay of less than a second), thus generating a very disturbing echo for her. Even if *Boomerang* is by no means a self-portrait, and is only mentioned here to illustrate video’s self-encapsulation effect due to sound reverberation, it cannot but evoke the nymph Echo who repeats the words of Narcissus, the emblematic figure of self-portraiture.

In line with Krauss, Raymond Bellour posits video as the most adequate medium to account for the ‘transformation of rhetorical tradition in the modern space of subjectivity’.<sup>88</sup> What is meant by ‘rhetorical tradition’ is the autobiographical tradition, which consists in an outward movement whereby the author wishes to convince an audience. According to Bellour, there are five reasons to this particular suitability of video for the self-portrait, some of which have already been evoked: firstly, the video image is continuous, present without delay; secondly, and as a result of this, it is easier for the artist to place his/her body within the image thanks to the monitor’s function as a mirror; thirdly, it is much easier to transform and manipulate the video image in a more intimate environment, as it ‘can more directly translate one’s visual impressions’.<sup>89</sup> Fourthly, in the context of the transformation of classical rhetoric in which television, among other mass media, regulates invention and memory, video art provides a means of resistance against the latter by way of the self-portrait, which ‘naturally becomes the

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<sup>84</sup> Rosalind Krauss, ‘Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism’, *October*, 1 (Spring, 1976), 50-64, p. 50.

<sup>85</sup> *Id.*, p. 52.

<sup>86</sup> *Id.*, p. 52-53.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Raymond Bellour, ‘Self-Portraits’, *op. cit.*, p. 340.

<sup>89</sup> *Id.*, p. 341.

most subjective expression of video art's specific resistance to television'.<sup>90</sup> Finally, Bellour anticipated that due to the technological transformations about to take place (his article was initially published in French in 1988), a new and yet ancient form of self-portraiture would emerge in the following years, something of which the technology of video partook.<sup>91</sup> What he means by a *new and yet very old* form of self-portraiture is perhaps that throughout the centuries, from drawing onto walls with charcoal, to painting, to photography, to video, and now to digital technologies, the self-portrait would go on raising similar issues despite different techniques and media.

### THE SELF-PORTRAIT BEYOND VIDEO

Over two decades after his article was published, given the explosion of self-exposure in social media – of which the *selfie* phenomenon is a very good example<sup>92</sup> –, one can only admit that the radical changes brought about by the development of digital technologies, the web, and its social networks have confirmed Bellour's intuition. In *Les Glaneurs et la Glaneuse*, Agnès Varda praises the virtues of her camcorder for its ease of use (for instance the fact that it enables her to film one of her hands with the other), as well as for the narcissistic effects it allows, among other things. However, while electronic video has been replaced by digital devices, there have been some interesting cases of self-portraits made on celluloid film. To name only a few, Tehching Hsieh's *One Year Performance 1980-1981 (Time Clock Piece)* (Taiwan, 1981); *Autoportrait au Dispositif (Self-Portrait with Device)*, Christian Lebrat, France, 1981); *Kamera* (Dietmar Brehm, Germany, 1997); *At a Same Time Expose Both Sides* (Jun'ichi Okuyama, Japan, 1990); Olivier Fouchard's *Autoportrait refilmé (Re-filmed Self-Portrait)*, France, 1998) were all shot on 16 mm. In the absence of data as to the exact proportion that such works represent in relation to video self-portraits, the point is not to contradict Bellour's argument about video, all the more so that these films are certainly the exception that proves the rule. But, as if they denoted a longing for some degree of

<sup>90</sup> Raymond Bellour, 'Self-Portraits', *op. cit.*, pp. 342.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> The selfie, a photograph of oneself by oneself usually made with portable devices such as smartphones, tablets, or computers, brings into play issues about amateur and everyday practices, self-exposure in social media, as well as new forms of gazing. In many respects, it is comparable to the artistic practice of self-portraiture. For Laura Busetta, rather than revealing *who I am*, the selfie act claims *here I am*, thus focusing on presence and self-inscription – especially in the virtual space of the worldwide web – within a strategy of personal archiving organised around serialisation and repetition, which ultimately builds a fragmented narrative. Laura Busetta, *Testing oneself in the digital media: self-representation and repetition*, unpublished conference paper, NECS, Milan, 20 June 2014.

materiality, they somehow establish a parallel between the destiny of the human body after death and the potential destruction of film, so that to work with celluloid is perhaps a way to conjure the dematerialisation of the image and ultimately of the self. Louise Bourque's *Self-Portrait Post Mortem* (Canada, 2005, 2'30'') is an interesting case in point.

Having buried in her garden random footage of her family that she had shot on 35 mm, Bourque retrieved it five years later, only to realise that she also featured in it. This *found footage*, literally speaking, thus seemed quite fitting for a self-portrait. Besides, such an appropriation of coincidence is an apt illustration of Beaujour's statement that 'the self-portrait is in the first place a *found object* to which the writer [here, the film-maker] imparts the purpose of self-portrayal in the course of its elaboration'.<sup>93</sup> In Bourque's short film, images of damaged film unfold for about a minute until the film-maker's face eventually emerges like a ghostly figure and disappears again under the traces of mould (fig. 5).



**Fig. 5: *Self-portrait Post-mortem* (Louise Bourque, 2005)**

Here, the film's chemical decomposition aptly suggests the passing of time, the aging process, and eventually death, hence the film's title. In addition, with respect to the film stock, the ephemerality is double in that not only is the material itself bound to decompose, but celluloid film is being replaced by digital technology. In this sense, the film strip paradoxically contributes to conjuring immateriality by enhancing matter and organicity while this heightened physicality only stresses all the more so the impending death of both film and body. Bourque's patience in leaving the footage buried for five years points to the extension of time and is, ironically enough, at the exact opposite of video's most emphasised properties in terms of immediacy and contraction of time,

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<sup>93</sup> Michel Beaujour, *Poetics of the Literary Self-portrait*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

which results from the simultaneous recording and projection processes. In Bourque's case, the self-portrait, rather than a reflection in the mirror-screen, amounts to a memory-image of the past, almost literally sent from beyond the grave. As such, it points to quite a different temporal dimension in that the present tense of video gives here way to a sense of timelessness and eternity.

In the light of these examples, does it make sense to consider video, or even digital technology as the most adequate medium for self-portraiture? It certainly does insofar as it emphasises the latter's temporality in terms of immediacy and instantaneity, but Bellour also acknowledges that the significance of video as he envisages it is historically contingent:

But one must understand "video" to be set off in quotes. This is a special situation, that will have prevailed only for the limited time in which the two image regimes face off [...] each influencing and displacing the other until, eventually, one way or another, they become one.<sup>94</sup>

Over twenty years later, digital media have radically transformed the spaces and forms of self-representation, and this does not apply exclusively to self-portraiture of course. In this context, the resort by some film-makers to celluloid film – before its complete disappearance, perhaps – is especially symptomatic of the current historical and technological shift. Furthermore, this contrasted use raises different issues about the medium, in terms of materiality, for instance; self-inscription in time (immediacy versus slowness, eternity versus ephemerality); organic or physical versus virtual presence; visibility and so forth. However, beyond these specificities, what remains constant throughout is the artists' concern for the medium they choose, which eventually becomes the subject of the film.

## DIARY

The diary is commonly understood as a daily record of events and matters affecting the writer personally (*OED*). Rascaroli defines it more precisely as a 'quintessential work-in-progress, open and unstable, instantaneous and discontinuous by nature [which] mixes high and low, both in stylistic registers and subject matter'.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Raymond Bellour, 'Self-Portraits', *op. cit.*, p. 340.

<sup>95</sup> Laura Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera*, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

Sitney even compares it to a notebook because of its loose chronology.<sup>96</sup> The focus on everyday life places it in opposition to autobiography and brings it closer to the self-portrait if we consider the latter's dimension as a working tool and scrap surface for the artist to practice his/her skills.

In line with this, in the context of cinema, the diary film is intrinsically linked to amateur practices, as David E. James argues: 'film diaries as a genre emerged as an adaptation of the stylistics and social functions of home movies'.<sup>97</sup> While there are substantial differences between film diaries and home movies that will not be developed here, they have several things in common, such as the mode of production and subject matter. As portable devices, amateur cameras (16 mm, 8 mm, Super 8, and later video) had been designed for individual use. When the film-makers of the American underground adopted them after the Second World War, they also turned towards the artisanal production and distribution modes as well as amateur aesthetics that went along with them, as a rejection of the costly large-scale apparatus and professional aesthetics prevailing in the mainstream film industry.<sup>98</sup> Thus, in a way comparable to the role it played for the self-portrait film, the medium has also been determinant in the development of the diary film.

#### PRIVATE VERSUS PUBLIC SPHERES

In these circumstances, it was only natural that through this 'one-man creation',<sup>99</sup> artists eventually turned the cameras onto themselves, literally and metaphorically. As in amateur home movies, artists' film diaries often concentrate on the domestic environment, that is family and friends, as, among other examples, in Dominique Cabrera's videos; home and the neighbourhood, as in Joseph Morder's lifelong diary series; or even the bedroom as in Sadie Benning's teenage diaries.<sup>100</sup> It may involve

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<sup>96</sup> P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-garde* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 398.

<sup>97</sup> David E. James, 'Film Diary/Diary Film: Practice and Product in Walden', in David E. James (ed.) *To Free the Cinema: Jonas Mekas & the New York Underground* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 145-179 (p. 151, footnote n. 8).

<sup>98</sup> Jonas Mekas, 'On Law, Morality, and Censorship', *Movie Journal* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1972), pp. 132-136 (pp. 134-135).

<sup>99</sup> *Id.*, p. 134.

<sup>100</sup> Dominique Cabrera films, *Demain et Encore Demain*, *Journal 1995 (Tomorrow and Again Tomorrow: Diary, 1995, France, 1997)* and *Grandir (Growing up, France, 2013)*. By Sadie Benning: *Me and my Rubyfruit* (USA, 1989); *If Every Girl Had a Diary* (USA, 1990); *Jollies* (USA, 1990); *A Place Called Lovely* (USA, 1991); *It Wasn't Love* (USA, 1992). Although Stan Brakhage made numerous home movies about his family, strictly speaking, these are not diaries.

travel, as in Mekas's work or in Calle and Shepard's *Double Blind*. For James, the growing interest in the diary film is also related to the increasingly blurred boundaries between art and life that pervaded American culture throughout the 1960s. Moreover, the emphasis on intimacy also attracted women to this form, in keeping with feminists' claims about the personal being political. In fact, James attributes to American filmmaker Marie Menken the invention of the film diary genre.<sup>101</sup>

At the same time, the diary often plays a significant role in documenting the everyday life of a community. Among the above cited examples, the early reels of Mekas's diaries focus on the Lithuanian diaspora in New York.<sup>102</sup> In *Caro Diario (Dear Diary)*, Italy, 1994), Nanni Moretti offers a mirror of the Italian society of the 1990s; while the French presidential elections occupy a prominent place in Cabrera's *Demain et Encore Demain*. In these cases, the diary opens up a space in which the film-makers confront themselves not only with their immediate domestic environment but also with the political and social one, which they consider as inseparable from their everyday life. This points to the relation between private and public spheres and raises the question as to whether the author writes/films for him/herself or with an audience in mind; and, if so, whether this audience is meant to be public or private. In this sense, video letters also constitute a form of diary as they build a diaristic correspondence between two film-makers, which relies on the regularity of the exchange.<sup>103</sup> What characterises such exchanges is the fragmented structure through the alternation of respective subjectivities – as in the intertwined diaries of Calle and Shepard in *Double Blind* –, while the mode of address is direct and intended for a specific interlocutor. About *Video Letter*, Bellour notes that gradually, the viewer struggles to identify the images of one or the other filmmaker, an effect he attributes to the 'power of the autonomy of the image', so that, 'by speaking to the other, each man questions himself about the other's identity in order to define – or to undefine – his own'.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> David E. James, 'Film Diary/Diary Film', *op. cit.*, pp. 149-151.

<sup>102</sup> See for instance *Diaries, Notes, and Sketches (Walden)*, which includes footage shot between 1964 and 1968 (USA, 1969), *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* (USA, 1972); and *Lost, Lost, Lost*, consisting of diaries shot between 1949 and 1963 (USA, 1975).

<sup>103</sup> See for instance Shito Terayama and Shuntaro Tanikawa (*Video Letter*, Japan, 1982-1983), discussed in Raymond Bellour, 'Video Writing', in Doug Hall & Sally Jo Fifer (eds), *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art* (New York: Aperture Foundation, 1990), pp. 436-443. See also *The Complete Letters: Filmed Correspondence* series, commissioned by Jordi Balló, for an exhibition that toured from Mexico, Argentina, Spain, to France between 2011 and 2014.

<sup>104</sup> Raymond Bellour, 'Video Writing', *op. cit.*, pp. 438-439.

*PRACTICE VERSUS ARTEFACT*

Ultimately, the diary's mode of address also amounts to questioning the latter's significance as either practice or artefact (therefore aimed a public), a difference that David E. James sums up in the distinction between *film diary*, on the one hand, and *diary film*, on the other.<sup>105</sup> This question is not always clear to the authors themselves. When Mekas started to film on a regular basis from 1949 onwards, he did not understand immediately the relevance of his footage, that he merely regarded as a training exercise until he managed to make a proper film, as he puts it; only in retrospect, as he watched the material thereby produced, did he realise that it had the structure of a diary film.<sup>106</sup> This harks back to the diachronic structure identified by Sitney as characteristic of autobiography. In this sense, Mekas's work typically lies at a crossroads between autobiography and diary given the long period of time over which he made his films and, more importantly, given the temporal gap between the moment of shooting, embedded in the present tense, and that of editing (the retrospective gaze), as he reflects upon past images of himself as a younger man. The coexisting dimensions of the diary as simultaneously object and practice are paramount for understanding the intertwining of temporalities at work here. In fact, what makes the specificity of the diary is perhaps as much its particular mode of self-representation as, if not more, its temporal structure.

As artefact, the *diary film*, which extends over a certain period of the author's life and uses a diachronic structure as in Mekas's case, is close to the autobiography, which seeks narrative continuity. As such, it is also comparable to the written diary, which necessarily relies on a temporal gap (although shorter than autobiography) between the experienced event and its recording. The diachronicity of the diary film combines two present tenses: the present of filming, which becomes a past in relation to the present of the editing moment. In terms of point of view, James compares the distinction between the 'I' of the image and that of the editing moment – a *meta-subject* – to the one established by Émile Benveniste between *history* and *discourse*.<sup>107</sup> Yet, André Gaudreault's distinction between the two moments of narration, *monstration* and *narration*, is also particularly fitting in that the first corresponds to images unfolding onscreen, which contribute to maintaining the illusion of the present tense, while the

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<sup>105</sup> David E. James, 'Film Diary/Diary Film', *op. cit.*, pp.145-179.

<sup>106</sup> Jonas Mekas, 'The Diary Film', *op. cit.*, p. 191.

<sup>107</sup> David E. James, 'Film Diary/Diary Film', *op. cit.*, p. 154.

second corresponds to the retrospective moment of editing.<sup>108</sup> The parallel between autobiography and diary does not mean that film autobiography is necessarily built out of diary images. Despite these punctual overlaps, the autobiography tends to stress past temporalities while the diary film, despite its retrospective construction, brings forward fragments of present.

As practice, by contrast, the *film diary* only records present moments of the everyday as they are taking place, in a way comparable to the self-portrait, which endeavours to capture a moment in the artist's life (often at work). In this case, it generates for Sitney a 'series of discontinuous presents'.<sup>109</sup> Likewise for James, 'image and audio recording [...] cannot escape the present and the present tense, for filming can only capture events as they happen. [...] What is essentially at stake in the film diary lies in the moment of shooting.'<sup>110</sup> In addition, this 'series of discontinuous presents' underlines the routine dimension of a gesture, like a ritual performed regularly and often over several years, something that the word *diary* also denotes, even if the film-makers may not film literally every day.

#### DIARY AS REPETITION

This repetitive rhythm is particularly well illustrated in a film by Tehching Hsieh, entitled *One Year Performance 1980-1981 (Time Clock Piece)* (Taiwan, 1981), for which, during one year, the artist punched a card in a time clock on every hour, in his studio. He filmed the repeated action with a 16 mm camera and edited together a single frame from each of these sequences. To 'help illustrate the passing of time', he shaved his head before starting.<sup>111</sup> As a result, 8,766 juxtaposed photograms condense this one-year long performance into a nearly six minute long film in which we watch Hsieh standing beside the clock while his hair is gradually growing back. He invariably wears the same shirt (only the undershirt changes) and stands in the same position (fig. 6). In spite of this ritual, the fact that each shot is taken from a different sequence introduces micro-variations: from one image to the next, Hsieh's position never coincides perfectly so that he seems to move slightly; the colour of his undershirt varies, so does the intensity of the lighting while the punch cards accumulate on the wall behind him.

<sup>108</sup> André Gaudreault, *From Plato to Lumière: Narration and Monstration in Literature and Cinema* (1988), trans. by Timothy Barnard (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), pp. 62-89.

<sup>109</sup> P. Adams Sitney, 'Autobiography in Avant-garde Film', *op. cit.*, p. 245.

<sup>110</sup> David E. James, 'Film Diary/Diary Film', *op. cit.*, p. 153 & 155.

<sup>111</sup> As he explained in the film's prologue.

Consequently, the impression of movement is not only induced by the artist's hair growing back but also by these incremental changes within repetition. Although Hsieh's performance is in many respects closer to a self-portrait, to some extent, it is a film diary as well, which epitomises once more the extent to which the different forms of self-representation intersect.<sup>112</sup> Thus, the ritual dimension of this performance also highlights the importance of temporality at play in the diary: through repetition, time is decomposed like a flip-book into snapshots or 'discontinuous presents' while the narrative, as minimal as it may be (the growth of the artist's hair), resituates the subject in the forward and even accelerated movement of time.



**Fig. 6: One Year Performance 1980-1981 (Time Clock Piece), (Tehching Hsieh, 1981)**

The repetition of certain actions in time is such an inherent pattern in the diary that Tim Corrigan goes as far as to consider Alan Clarke's short fiction film, *Elephant* (UK, 1988), as an essayistic diary on these grounds. The film is set in Belfast and describes a series of murders while the structure is almost invariably the same: in each of the eighteen different sequences into which the film is divided, the camera follows one man (sometimes two) walking fast and resolutely towards a specific target: another man (sometimes two as well) about to be killed by the former.<sup>113</sup> The following shot systematically consists of a long static frame of the victim lying dead. There is hardly any dialogue and the regularity of the enviroing soundscape is only interrupted by the rhythmic sound of the killers' footsteps and the gunshots. Despite its documentary and direct cinema aesthetics, *Elephant* is a fictional work, while the subjective voice of the author is strangely invisible, not to say absent. This is why Corrigan's description of the film as an 'essayistic diary' seems farfetched at first sight, all the more so that the latter

<sup>112</sup> Obviously, this work also deals with other issues, which will not be tackled here, such as the reconstruction of the cinematographic movement; the measuring and acceleration of time; visible and documentary evidence; not to mention the control of labour and the work force.

<sup>113</sup> The last sequence differs slightly from this pattern. For a detailed discussion on the film, see Tim Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 147-153.

does not contain any other element characteristic of the diary: no temporal markers of day-to-day life beyond the film's idiosyncratic rhythmic pattern; no explicit representation of the director's quotidian or expression of his intimacy. And yet, in an interesting way, Corrigan justifies his point by arguing that the 'film reshapes the diary as a public diary', that is, a 'diary of public life in Northern Ireland [that] takes place in the "ordinary space" and time of the 1980s [...]'.<sup>114</sup> This ties in with the argument made earlier about the diary as a subjective record of social and political life. Yet, more importantly, the temporal experience and repetition confer upon the film its diaristic structure, if only by extension, but in a way that could be compared to Hsieh's performance. Indeed, it is made out of 'structural repetitions within a fragmentary length' that depict 'daily matter'. Moreover, '[*Elephant*] strangely reinvests public experience with the excruciating temporality of everyday Belfast, stretched between banal emergencies and attendant boredoms [...]'. In addition, the film portrays 'experience as a daily, interminable encounter with the violent shocks and aftershocks of recognition'.<sup>115</sup>

#### THE TEMPORAL SELF

For Corrigan, it is precisely this alienating temporality that does away with the subject in the film. If this very subject is traditionally presented as fragmented in the essay form, here, it is purely and simply dissolved, thus pushing the representation of subjectivity to its outer limits, in fact off the frame: 'to watch *Elephant* is to be subjected to a time slot made up only of temporal shapes vacated of temporal logics, in which subjectivity has been moved off the screen and in which the interstices that remain are only a series of temporal imperatives'.<sup>116</sup> In other words, subjectivity is suppressed by the ritual of violence that daily experience in Belfast is reduced to. It is not always clear if Corrigan uses the terms subject and subjectivity in reference to the film-maker, the character, or the spectator, or all at once. In any case, his point remains particularly thought-provoking in that it emphasises the relevance of time as a repetitive rhythm in diaristic narrative structures. Furthermore, the 'obsession with the timing of subjectivity' shifts the interrogation about the thinking subjectivity. Questions such as 'who am I?' and 'where am I?' give way to interrogations of a temporal order: "'when

<sup>114</sup> Tim Corrigan, *The Essay Film*, op. cit., p. 147.

<sup>115</sup> *Id.*, pp. 150-151.

<sup>116</sup> *Id.*, p. 153.

am I?” “At what speeds and how often am I?” or “According to which temporal imperatives am I?”<sup>117</sup> As a result, *Elephant* seems to function as a sort of contrapuntal or counter-diary: it displaces issues of subjectivity and intimacy by suggesting the possibility of a public – and collective, one could add – diary; the split and scattered subject is here replaced by an absent one; and finally, the concerns have shifted from identity and topography of the self to issues about place in time. In parallel, repetition may function like an attempt to heal the trauma of a tragic political situation by exhausting the moment of shock, as it does in the case studies, especially in the case of Sophie Calle (in a much lighter context).

If Corrigan’s understanding of the diary seems excessively broad, it has nonetheless the virtue of bringing into question the place of the self as author in the diary. Indeed, it is generally assumed that the diary is necessarily introspective and autobiographical (in the broad sense of the word) but this has perhaps more to do with the expression of the author’s subjectivity, as its definition in the context of literature suggests. Similarly, in the case of the moving image, James observes that ‘the film diary must go to greater lengths to include the author (shooting mirror images or shadows, or having some other person handle the camera), otherwise authorship must be inscribed in style’.<sup>118</sup> Thus, as for the essay, self-inscription in the diary is not self-evident unless the film-maker turns the device onto him/herself or uses self-portraying strategies. To follow up on James’s remark, ‘authorship must be inscribed in style’... and in language, for the paramount importance of the text and the voice to enhance the author’s subjectivity has to be stressed. As he acknowledges, a film-maker like Mekas was able to articulate the recording of ‘the phenomenal world in a way consonant with what we take for the ontology of the medium’ with the expression of ‘the subjectivity that verbal discursivity and composition after the fact allows the written diary’.<sup>119</sup> It is not a coincidence that, before leaving his native Lithuania, Mekas had been a poet and essayist, so that the shift from writing to film-making only seemed natural, especially through the diary form, which, given its heterogeneity in terms of style and material, lies at a crossroads between autobiography, self-portraiture, and the essay.<sup>120</sup> Hence, the film diary potentially combines bodily self-inscription with introspection and self-

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<sup>117</sup> Tim Corrigan, *The Essay Film*, *op. cit.*, p. 153 (my emphasis).

<sup>118</sup> David E. James, ‘Film Diary/Diary Film’, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> About the connection between the diary and the essay, see Tim Corrigan, *The Essay Film*, *op. cit.*, Chapter 5, pp. 131-153.

expression, while, as artefact, its editing process structures fragmented narratives shot over the years into a coherent expression of the film-maker's life.

## ESSAY

If the diary is recurrently associated with the essay, the definition of the latter is in fact open enough to encompass other modes of self-inscription as well, such as memoirs, the letter, the confession, the notebook, and even, to some extent, the self-portrait and the autobiography. This is only symptomatic of the essay's inherent hybridity and the difficulty to define a mode that 'does not permit its domain to be prescribed', as Adorno puts it.<sup>121</sup> Indeed, notwithstanding some variations, most critics and scholars who wrote about the literary or filmic essay agree as to the difficulty to ascribe a clear definition to it.

### *THE BIRTH OF A NEW CINEMATIC FORM*

The first significant and explicit attempt by a film-maker to transpose the essay mode to the cinema was made by Eisenstein as he planned to adapt Karl Marx's *Capital* to the screen. Moreover, he is purportedly the first film-maker to have introduced the term in his cinematic vocabulary, even if earlier films have been considered retrospectively as essays.<sup>122</sup> Although his project about *The Capital* did not materialise, Eisenstein envisaged the film as a collection of 'cinematographic essays' not to illustrate or paraphrase Marx's text but 'to teach the worker to think dialectically' and to devise a way of thinking through images, that is, through specifically "'extra-thematic" imagery'.<sup>123</sup> When, in the 1940s, Hans Richter and Alexandre Astruc announced a new kind of cinema, which was yet to emerge, they remained focused on, respectively,

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<sup>121</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Essay as Form' [1958], *New German Critique*, trans. by Bob Hullot-Kantor & Frederic Will, 32, Spring-Summer 1984, p. 152.

<sup>122</sup> According to Guy Fihman, 'L'essai cinématographique et ses transformations expérimentales' in *L'essai et le cinéma*, ed. by Susanne Liandrat-Guigues and Murielle Gagnebin (Seyssel: Vallon, 2004), pp. 41-48 (p. 41). D.W. Griffith's *A Corner in the Wheat* (USA, 1909); Hans Richter's *Inflation* (Germany, 1928), and Benjamin Christensen's *Häxan* (*Witchcraft Through the Ages*, Denmark/Sweden, 1922) have been cited as early essays; see, respectively, Tim Corrigan, *The Essay Film*, *op. cit.*, p. 3; José Moure, 'Essai de définition de l'essai au cinéma', in *L'essai et le cinéma*, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-39 (p. 27).

<sup>123</sup> Serguei Eisenstein, 'Notes for a Film of *Capital*', *October*, 2 (Summer 1976), 3-26, p. 10.

documentary and the invention of a new cinematic language at large.<sup>124</sup> Despite these harbingers, the essay film did not really emerge until the post-war period, especially during the 1950s and 1960s, at which point critics hailed it as the evidence of a new cinematographic mode and as key to the regeneration of the cinema after the Second World War.<sup>125</sup> Rascaroli picks up on the striking recurrence of comments claiming the newness of the essay film, which seems to be perpetually announcing a form yet about to emerge. She relates this to Adorno's claim that 'the relevance of the essay is that of anachronism', to argue that it is 'constitutively against its time'. Thus, the moment of the essay is that of the future, which is also why, among other reasons, it is politically inflected: it is set in a permanent utopian 'tomorrow'.<sup>126</sup>

As for the historical development of the essay film, she notes that France became a privileged ground, thanks to the emergence of the French New Wave and the auteur theory in addition to other historical factors (such as governmental incentives, public grants, and patronage).<sup>127</sup> For Paul Arthur, both France and Germany were 'most responsible for nurturing the essay' as a consequence of the war and the trauma of the Holocaust.<sup>128</sup> While at the time, the production of and writing on essay films were by no means exclusive to French or German film-makers and critics, as Rascaroli also notes, in France, the coining of the expression *cinéma d'art et d'essai* (usually translated as art cinema) and its transformation into an institutional entity as early as 1955 is certainly symptomatic of the significance that this form was gaining in the French cinematographic scape, with film-makers such as Chris Marker, Alain Resnais, Jean-

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<sup>124</sup> Hans Richter, 'Der Filmessay: eine neue Form des Dokumentarfilms' [1940], in *Schreiben Bilder Sprechen: Texte zum essayistischen Film*, ed. by Christa Blümlinger and Constantin Wulff (Wien: Sonderzahl, 1992), 195-198; Alexandre Astruc 'The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Style' [1948], in Timothy Corrigan, *Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1999), pp. 158-162.

<sup>125</sup> For a more detailed historical overview, see Laura Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera*, *op. cit.*, p. 28; Corrigan focuses on the period between 1945 and the present, Tim Corrigan, *The Essay Film*, *op. cit.*, p. 7. About critics' comments on essay films, see, for instance, Jacques Rivette on *Viaggio in Italia* (*Voyage to Italy*, Roberto Rossellini, Italy, 1954), 'Letter on Rossellini' [1955], in *Rivette: Texts and Interviews*, ed. by Jean Narboni and Jonathan Rosenbaum, trans. by Amy Gateff and Tom Milne (London: British Film Institute, 1977), pp. 54-64; and André Bazin on *Lettre de Sibérie* (*Letter from Siberia*, Chris Marker, France, 1957), 'Bazin on Marker' [1958], *Film Comment*, 39: 4, July-August 2003, pp. 44-45.

<sup>126</sup> Theodor W. Adorno 'The Essay as Form', *op. cit.*, p. 170. Laura Rascaroli, 'The Moment of the Essay Film: Forever New, Anachronistic' (unpublished paper delivered at the opening conference of the Essay Film Festival, Birkbeck Institute for the Moving Image: 'Why the Essay Film Now?', London, 24 March 2015), [I am grateful to Laura Rascaroli who gave me access to her conference paper].

<sup>127</sup> Laura Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera*, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>128</sup> Paul Arthur, 'Essay questions: From Alain Resnais to Michael Moore', *Film Comment*, 39:1, (2003), 58-62, p. 61.

Luc Godard, Agnès Varda, and the likes.<sup>129</sup>

### DETRITUS AND SCRAP

The word *essay* covers such a broad range of fields and significations that it risks losing meaning altogether, as Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues observes.<sup>130</sup> Similarly, Denis Lévy suggests that the essay ‘gathers everything that, in the cinema, is unclassifiable’ according to the usual criteria of genre, fiction, documentary, artistic, and commercial circuits; hence, the essay is by nature a collection of detritus.<sup>131</sup> For José Moure, its etymological root suggests the idea of putting something in balance, experimenting; in this sense, the essay is perhaps closer to the scrapbook given its association with work in progress.<sup>132</sup> In fact, Montaigne wrote the three volumes of his *Essays* over the course of fourteen years and kept editing them from the moment of their first publication until his death. As he puts it: ‘[i]f my soul could only find a footing I would not be *assaying* myself but resolving myself. But my soul is ever in its apprenticeship and being tested.’<sup>133</sup> Moreover, as Tim Corrigan aptly remarks, Montaigne wrote his *Essays* in vernacular French, the language of low culture as opposed to Latin, which enhances their dimension as an unachieved, experimental, and private work characteristic of scrap notes.<sup>134</sup> Lukács and Adorno see in this the reason for the essay’s general dismissal by their contemporary thinkers who regarded it as ‘anarchy, the denial of a form’, as well as ‘hybrid’ and ‘impure’.<sup>135</sup> However, for Adorno, this is precisely what makes the essay a truly unique and free form for the ‘ideals of purity and cleanliness bear the marks of a repressive order’, and he concludes his paper positing that the ‘law of the innermost form of the essay is heresy’.<sup>136</sup>

<sup>129</sup> The *Association française des cinémas d'art et d'essai*/AFCAE (French Association for Art House Cinemas) was founded in 1955.

<sup>130</sup> Susanne Liandrat-Guigues, ‘Un art de l’équilibre’, in *L’essai et le cinéma*, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-12, (p. 7-9).

<sup>131</sup> Denis Lévy, ‘Art et essai’, in *L’essai et le cinéma*, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-142, (p. 137) (my translation, as in all further quotations from this book).

<sup>132</sup> It comes from the Latin *exagium*, which means weighing and, by extension, examination or testing. José Moure, ‘Essai de définition de l’essai au cinéma’, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>133</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, Book Three, trans. by M. A. Screech (London: Penguin Books, [1991] 2003), p. 908. Between 1572, when Montaigne began writing, and the moment of his death in 1592, Books One and Two (first published in 1580) were re-edited three times and Book Three (first published in 1588) was edited a second time.

<sup>134</sup> Tim Corrigan, *The Essay Film*, *op. cit.* p. 13.

<sup>135</sup> See, respectively, György Lukács, ‘On the Nature and Form of the Essay: A Letter to Leo Popper’ [October 1910], in *Soul & Form*, trans. by Anna Bostock (New York: Columbia University Press, [1971] 1974), pp. 1-18 (p. 16); Theodor W. Adorno ‘The Essay as Form’, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

<sup>136</sup> *Id.*, pp. 156; 171.

The essay is often associated with the idea of fragmentation, itself in keeping with the mode of writing that characterises the scrapbook as a compendium of thoughts and reflections. In this sense, it stands in opposition to autobiography whose aim (however utopic) is totality. For Adorno, again, this is a landmark of the essay, which is ‘radically un-radical [...] in accentuating the fragmentary, the partial rather than the total’; it ‘resists the idea of the master-work that reflects the idea of creation and totality’.<sup>137</sup> And indeed, the essay film recurrently appears as a compilation of eclectic materials or found footage. Chris Marker explained that the starting point of *Le Fond de l’Air est Rouge* (*A Grin Without a Cat*, France, 1977) was to examine the common elements between the various bits of unused footage left over from previous films as they lay at the bottom of the cans, so as to interrogate ‘our repressed in images’, and which he articulated with another type of repressed: images from televised information that we have absorbed and forgotten too quickly.<sup>138</sup> Thus the reflection would arise from the confrontation between these images, as well as with the voice over commentaries and other sounds.

#### IN-BETWEENNESS

This points to another aspect underpinning the essay, which is intermediality. Textual and all sorts of materials pervade essay films, for instance, animation sequences in Richter’s *Inflation*, Marker’s *Lettre de Sibérie*, and even in Christensen’s *Häxan*. In *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges* (*Images of the World and Inscription of War*, Germany, 1988), Harun Farocki articulates simulation images, military archive material (including aerial photography), drawings, photographs, manuscripts, written text, as well as videos from different sources, with voice over commentaries in order to question the relationship between images and the language of war. In Vincent Dieutre’s *Leçons de Ténèbres* (*Tenebrae Lessons*, France, 2000), which is also, among other things, an essay on Caravaggism, the presence of painting partakes of this mixing of materials so as to provoke not only thought but also emotion and sensation. As will be examined in Chapter 6, intermediality is a form of in-betweenness, itself a strong characteristic of the essay.

The in-betweenness of the essay has to do with the impossibility of ascribing to it

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<sup>137</sup> *Id.*, pp. 157; 165.

<sup>138</sup> Chris Marker, Prologue to *Le Fond de l’Air est Rouge: Scènes de la Troisième Guerre Mondiale* (Paris: François Maspero, 1978), p. 5.

a stable and fixed definition, hence the sense of perpetual transition attached to it, as Adorno argues: ‘the desire of the essay is not to seek and filter the eternal out of the transitory, it wants, rather, to make the transitory eternal.’<sup>139</sup> This echoes Montaigne’s own statement about the instability of the world he purports to describe:

The world is but a perennial see-saw. Everything in it [...] all waver with a common motion and their own. Constancy itself is nothing but a more languid rocking to and fro. I am unable to stabilize my subject: it staggers confusedly along with a natural drunkenness [...] I am not portraying being but becoming [...] I must adapt this account of myself to the passing hour. I shall perhaps change soon, not accidentally but intentionally.<sup>140</sup>

Here, the changing nature of the world is a metonymy for the form of the essay. In addition, its inherent in-betweenness parallels its impossible association with a determined genre or category. In the context of cinema, it lies between documentary and fiction; it is neither one nor the other, but rather, for Arthur, ‘a meeting ground for documentary, avant-garde, and art film impulses’.<sup>141</sup> In the same vein, Corrigan argues that ‘the difficulties in defining and explaining the essay’ are precisely what makes it so creative:

Straddling fiction and nonfiction, news reports and confessional autobiography, documentaries and experimental film, [essay films] are, first, practices that undo and redo film form, visual perspectives, public geographies, temporal organizations, and notions of truth and judgment within the complexity of experience.<sup>142</sup>

Christa Blümlinger looks at in-betweenness in terms of editing for the power of the essay lies *between the images* and in the articulation between image and sound. However, ‘it is not only about the connection between what is said (off screen) and what is seen, but also about the transformations, which simultaneously affect image and language, and which must be thought of in relation to one another as matter.’<sup>143</sup> In other words, the key significance of editing in the essay film derives from its possibility to generate thought through a dialectical process of complementation between image and language, which are both inflected by one another. This is comparable to Bazin’s idea of horizontal montage, that is, a contrapuntal or, to borrow the linguists’ terminology, a

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<sup>139</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, ‘The Essay as Form’, p. 159.

<sup>140</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, Book Three, *op. cit.*, pp. 907-908.

<sup>141</sup> Paul Arthur, ‘Essay questions’, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

<sup>142</sup> Tim Corrigan, *The Essay Film*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>143</sup> Christa Blümlinger, ‘Lire entre les Images’, in *L’essai et le cinéma*, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-66 (pp. 53-54).

paradigmatic montage as opposed to a syntagmatic one.<sup>144</sup> In the light of these examples, it is from its hybrid position in-between media and in-between traditional or conventional narrative modes that the essay film draws its potential for creativity and inventiveness. Blümlinger adds that, due to the dialectical dimension of its editing process, the in-betweenness of the essay film ‘involves the spectator in the filmic discourse’ and seeks to provoke her/him by raising her/his awareness of the reciprocal questioning taking place between image and sound, thanks to ‘dynamic confrontations’.<sup>145</sup> In other writings, the role of the spectator is similarly, yet more explicitly, described as forming part of an essential dialogue with the author. Moure posits this as one of the five fundamental characteristics of the essay, which relies on a relation of ‘interlocution’, while for Rascaroli, it is based on a logic of interpellation, in the sense that the spectator ‘is called upon to participate and share the enunciator’s reflections’.<sup>146</sup> However, she insists that the ‘you’ of this dialogue with the author is not a generic audience but rather an embodied spectator. As a result, the dialogic principle that underpins the essay is precisely what accounts for its openness: because dialogue presupposes an exchange between author and reader/spectator, the essay’s rhetoric cannot consist of a complete or closed argument but, on the contrary, ‘opens up problems and interrogates the spectator’.<sup>147</sup>

#### ON THE SUBJECTIVE LANGUAGE OF THE ESSAY

The critics and theorists hitherto cited consider more or less unanimously the role of language as central in the essay form, and sometimes as even more important than the image (as Bazin argues).<sup>148</sup> The use of intertitles, textual inscriptions, and, most especially, the voice-over commentary are recurrent practices in this mode whilst they also stress the heritage of literature. Corrigan, for instance, claims that the essay film tackles the relationship between literature and cinema and is therefore a typical product of the collaboration between these two forms.<sup>149</sup> Similarly, Bazin describes *Lettre de*

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<sup>144</sup> ‘Bazin on Marker’, *Film Comment*, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>145</sup> Christa Blümlinger, ‘Lire entre les Images’, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>146</sup> José Moure, ‘Essai de définition de l’essai au cinéma’, *op. cit.*, p. 38; Laura Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera*, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> André Bazin, ‘Bazin on Marker’, *Film Comment*, *op. cit.*, p. 44; Philip Lopate, ‘In Search of the Centaur: The Essay Film’, *op. cit.*, p. 19; Laura Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera*, *op. cit.*, p. 27; Paul Arthur, ‘Essay questions’, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>149</sup> Tim Corrigan, *The Essay Film*, *op. cit.*, p. 6. See also, by the same author, ‘The Essay Film’, *Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), p. 58.

*Sibérie* as an essay ‘at once historical and political, written by a poet as well’, while Renov compares Mekas’s poetic and essayistic diaries with Montaigne’s *Essays*.<sup>150</sup> Besides, Astruc’s expression, the *camera-pen*, also hints at writing, even if he uses the expression to emphasise the advent of a more personal approach to film-making made possible by the development of the 16 mm camera.<sup>151</sup> In this respect, the medium also has relevance in this relation with literature: Renov, for example, posits a convergence between what he calls the essayistic mode and video, which is somehow in keeping with Bellour’s point when he argues that video is ‘deeply rooted in writing’, in fact more than in cinema.<sup>152</sup> For Renov, it is because of its capacity to simultaneously record and transmit, that video lends itself more readily to the corporeal self, which has been ‘the linchpin of essayistic discourse’ since Montaigne; this is why he sees video as constitutive of the essay, akin to Bellour in the context of the self-portrait.<sup>153</sup>

Underpinning many of the points discussed here is the idea that the essay, because inherently reflexive, translates the very personal expression of its author through his/her subjective voice: ‘Anyway these are *my* humours, *my* opinions: I give them as things, which *I* believe, not as things to be believed [...]’, says Montaigne, before adding: ‘My aim is to reveal my own self’. These words denote the modesty of Montaigne’s essayistic enterprise, in that he does not pretend to teach a universal knowledge, since he ‘[feels] too badly taught to teach others’, but rather aims to share his personal thoughts with the reader, hence the dialogic dimension.<sup>154</sup> And he goes as far as to posit that there is no difference between his book and himself when it comes to criticising one or the other: ‘Here my book and I go harmoniously at the same pace [...] touch one and you touch the other’.<sup>155</sup> This, let us suggest in passing, cannot but evoke the above-mentioned fusion existing between the self-portraitist and his/her art. Against this referential backdrop, the self-inscriptive dimension of the essay is recurrently underscored. If the essay does not systematically focus on the author’s personal life or history, it certainly translates a highly personal and subjective perspective. Blümlinger speaks of self-experimentation insofar as the author inscribes the ‘I’ in his/her reflections. Furthermore, the essay and the self-portrait are, indeed, comparable in their

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<sup>150</sup> André Bazin, ‘Bazin on Marker’, *Film Comment*, *op. cit.*, p. 44; Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>151</sup> Alexandre Astruc ‘The Birth of a New Avant-Garde’, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

<sup>152</sup> Raymond Bellour, ‘Video Writing’, *op. cit.*, p. 421.

<sup>153</sup> Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, *op. cit.*, p. 185-186.

<sup>154</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, Book One, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

<sup>155</sup> *Id.*, Book Three, p. 909.

writing mode. By integrating its own mode of enunciation in the scope of its reflection, the essay transcends the characteristic split between the writing and the written ego (which eventually becomes an *other*), so that the socio-historical exploration and that of the self coalesce.<sup>156</sup> Aldous Huxley posited the ‘personal and the autobiographical’ as one of the three poles between which the essay circulates.<sup>157</sup> As a result, even if the autobiographical or the self-portraying component is not always clearly and explicitly present in the essay, it looms more or less distinctly in its horizon and is therefore an essential, if only virtual, point of reference.

### TOWARDS A BLURRED GENRE?

The discussion outlined here is an attempt to reassess some of the issues at stake in self-representation via the four categories examined. It has enabled an identification of relatively characteristic strands for each of them, especially in terms of temporality. If one were to isolate an essential trait for each, it could be argued that autobiography tends to emphasise duration; self-portraiture, instant; diary, repetition; as for the essay, it stands out in relation to these categories insofar as it is described as anachronistic or set in a perpetual tomorrow. More precisely, as autobiography strains towards a sense of totality, it endeavours to reconstruct chronological continuity, while its inherently diachronic narrative structure derives from the retrospective perspective adopted. The self-portrait, which lies on the side of analogy, tends to provide a fragmented representation at a given moment, often depicting the artist at work; it is also associated with the metaphorical and the poetic, by contrast with autobiography’s focus on facts and narration. The diary simultaneously constitutes a practice, which relies on repetition, and an artefact, which also becomes diachronic if the film-maker chooses to retrospectively edit this sequence of present moments. Finally, the essay occupies a peculiar position in this selection: albeit highly subjective, it is not necessarily self-representational, and is characterised by fragmentation and in-betweenness given the impossibility to ascribe a clear definition to it. Similarly, in terms of temporality, it is not associated to a specific rhythmic pattern like the other three categories, but rather lies in a utopian temporality; as Rascaroli rightly claims, ‘the essay is the future film,

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<sup>156</sup> Christa Blümlinger, ‘Lire entre les Images’, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-56.

<sup>157</sup> The second and third being, respectively, the pole of the objective, the factual, the concrete-particular; and the pole of the abstract-universal. Aldous Huxley, ‘Preface to *The Collected Essays of Aldous Huxley*’, in *Aldous Huxley Complete Essays*, vol. 6: 1956-1963, ed. by Robert Baker and James Sexton (Chicago: Dee, 2002), 329-332, p. 330.

the film of tomorrow'.<sup>158</sup>

At the same time, the questions raised here also show the extent to which such distinctions, while essential, have their own limits because, more often than not, these categories overlap and form a series of circular connections. For example, in addition to the links already established between the essay and the self-portrait, the latter's temporality, as instant and fragment, that is as present moment, is in many respects similar to the present tense of the diary. This one, in turn, eventually becomes autobiographical when produced over a long period, and bears similarities with the essay in terms of unachieved and experimental form. The properties of editing inherent to the moving image necessarily enhance fragmentation in autobiography as well, despite the latter's association with totality and duration. Moreover, the referential pact lying at its basis is somehow comparable to the dialogic relation between author and reader/spectator posited about the essay. Finally, broad questions such as introspection, subject position, self-invention, the articulation between image and language (and writing), as well as the crucial role of the medium in determining such self-inscriptive practices, obviously concern all the categories examined. In fact, the case of video shows how the medium points to a convergence of self-inscriptive modes, namely between the self-portrait, the diary, and the essay. And to a lesser extent, the same could be argued for amateur formats.

The point is neither to exaggerate the specificities of each mode of self-representation, nor to deny the differences existing between them, but rather to stress the ways in which these categories function dialectically. They acquire significance in relation to one another and are often simultaneously present – to varying degrees – in works of self-representation. The films of Vincent Dieutre are a good example among others in which essayistic, self-portraying, autobiographical, and even diaristic (in the shape of a travelogue) elements are woven together. Thus, as a sign of the increasingly hybrid understanding of these forms, substantives have lost their strict sense in favour of an adjectival use, as Bellour's expression 'autobiographical space' illustrates.<sup>159</sup> Finally, if cinema did not really effect this shift, it certainly corroborated, while making it more visible, the growing awareness of the aporias already present in self-representation. Across the examination of the structural aspects that define these categories, many themes have been evoked in passing, such as the importance of the

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<sup>158</sup> Laura Rascaroli, 'The Moment of the Essay Film: Forever New, Anachronistic', *op. cit.*

<sup>159</sup> Raymond Bellour, 'Self-Portraits', *op. cit.*, p. 341; see also Philippe Lejeune 'Cinéma et autobiographie, problèmes de vocabulaire', *op. cit.*, p. 8.

voice over, the shifters, self-fiction, temporality, or even the political versus the personal, to name a few. As they transcend the boundaries expounded here, they are analysed within the case studies in the following chapters.

## CHAPTER 2. NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

Film has been the medium par excellence capable of exploiting the scattering inherent to contemporary self-representation. Through the intertwining of multiple visual and sound strategies, the technical apparatus adds a further level of complexity in the narrative construction. Indeed, the examination of the case studies shows how the strategies employed tend to emphasise a diffracted narration of the self. These range from the multiplication of narrative levels, points of view, or shifters, to the use of the voice as well as self-fiction, of which the structure of investigation also partakes.

### LEVELS OF NARRATION

The case of Vincent Dieutre is particularly interesting in terms of levels of narration, but to understand what is at play in his films, it will be useful to briefly go back to some of Benveniste and Genette's seminal reflections on narratology. For Gérard Genette, levels of narration correspond to a 'temporal (and spatial) gap' between the 'narrative act' (the *enunciation*) and the 'narrated action' (the *enounced*).<sup>1</sup> This corresponds to some extent to opposition established by Émile Benveniste between *history* and *discourse*, which is of a temporal order: 'The historical utterance [corresponds to] events that took place at a certain moment of time [and that] are presented without any intervention of the speaker in the narration.' Thus, *history* refers to past narration. By contrast, *discourse* refers to 'every utterance assuming a speaker and a hearer, and in the speaker, the intention of influencing the other in some way'.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Genette sees at least three levels of narration: the extra-diegetic, with an external narrator for instance; the diegetic, with one or several internal narrators; and the meta-diegetic, which corresponds to a second degree narrative, that is a narrative-within-the-narrative whereby the latter's *mise en abyme* is potentially infinite.

To come back to Dieutre, his fourth feature length film, *Mon Voyage d'Hiver* (hereafter referred to as *Mon Voyage*)<sup>3</sup> is perhaps his most achieved experiment in

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<sup>1</sup> Gérard Genette, *Figures III* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), p. 238. In the same vein, Edward Branigan draws from the opposition between enounced and enunciation to distinguish between *narrative* and *narration*. He also uses *discourse* as synonym for narration but to avoid the risk of confusion, his terminology will not be used here. Edward Branigan, *Point of View in the Cinema: A Theory of Narration and Subjectivity in Classical Film* (Berlin, New York, Amsterdam: Mouton Publishers, 1984), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Émile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, *op. cit.*, p. 207; 209.

<sup>3</sup> See synopsis, p. 273.

establishing a rich narrative structure thanks to the filmic apparatus. Like his previous works, it follows another simple journey-based narrative. However, its complexity is derived primarily from the shooting structure that the film-maker employs to convey the different emotions and points of view that are woven together. On the simplest level, Vincent drives his godson, a teenager called Itvan, to Berlin. Gradually, it also becomes the story of Vincent's relationship with former lovers who introduced him to German culture and history. In addition, extra-diegetic scenes of musicians playing Schubert's *Lieder* in a recording studio alternate with the film's diegetic sequences. Two operators use professional equipment – a 16 mm and a digital camera – while Itvan appears regularly with a digital camcorder.

The presence of the three cameras provides two sets of opposition: between analogue and digital technologies on the one hand, and between amateur and professional devices on the other. These contrasts contribute to the film's visual 'track' that shifts and articulates its narrational register. The narrative structure thus relies on the use of the different types of camera to convey different levels of subjectivity, with each device being assigned a very precise role. The 16 mm camera offers a relatively neutral point of view because it is used for static framing as well as medium and long shots. All sequences of the musicians are shot on 16 mm for instance (fig. 7). By contrast, those shot with the video camera are more dynamic. Close-ups and unstable shots of the characters often seem to steal moments of their privacy. For example, an early sequence shows quite clearly the alternative use of the two main cameras, when Vincent and Itvan arrive in Tübingen, the first stage of their journey. The next day, Itvan goes running while Vincent stays in his hotel room and is filmed taking medication through a door left ajar (fig. 8). These two scenes are shot on digital and are followed by one of the musicians, filmed in 16 mm format, which re-establishes an extra-diegetic level of narration comparable to what Benveniste calls *history* for it offers a more (physically) distant gaze. By contrast, through its shaky style, the video camera makes its presence far more conspicuous and tends to focus on human interactions in order to catch their hidden detail. This utterly voyeuristic position implies the presence of a hypothetical viewer to a much higher degree than in the case of the 16 mm camera, thus pointing to the function of *discourse*. Accordingly, the video breaks the implicit neutrality of the narrative flow established by the 16 mm by inserting moments of the characters' privacy, especially that of Vincent. Both professional cameras remain at an extra-diegetic level.



Fig. 7

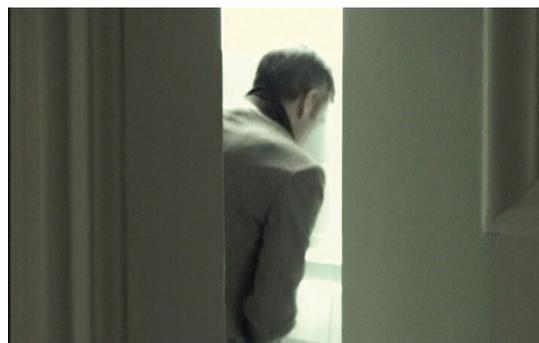


Fig. 8

***Mon Voyage d'Hiver* (Vincent Dieutre, 2003)**

The musical sequences stand autonomously side-by-side with the main narrative and do not bear any relation of a hierarchical order with the story of the journey. In this sense, they cannot be described as meta-diegetic, in Genette's definition, and yet they do form a narrative within the narrative. Dieutre explained about these scenes that he did not want their presence to seem incidental but, instead, planned and integral to the film. 'This is also why', he adds, 'we insisted these sequences be shot on 16 mm, not just like video coverage to show that we had the musicians at hand [...] but in order to really turn them into cinema shots within the film [...]'.<sup>4</sup> What he means by 'cinema shot' is a prepared sequence, as opposed to a journalistic and apparently more spontaneous style in which the video camera would catch the scenes behind the scenes or the unexpected. Dieutre had already used a similar pattern for *Leçons de Ténèbres* (hereafter referred to as *Leçons*)<sup>5</sup> which is very close to *Mon Voyage* in terms of narrative structure. The films are in fact like the dark (but warm) and bright (but cold) versions of a similar story. In *Leçons*, Vincent appears frequently on screen while the close-ups on the paintings and *chiaroscuro* scenes of Vincent in Caravaggiesque poses have a similar status to the musical ones in *Mon Voyage*. At the same time, just as in *Mon Voyage*, the film-maker's voice over conveys a carefully written and constructed narrative. Dieutre himself made the connection between both films as he explained why he had used three different formats for *Leçons* (35 mm, video, and super 8).<sup>6</sup> The 35 mm format was used for static and tracking shots to establish a cinematographic setting and for a better quality of the image, as he puts it. It focuses mostly on urban scenes and, in narrative terms, is at the level of the *history*, just like the 16 mm device in

<sup>4</sup> Vincent Dieutre, 'Entretien de Vincent Dieutre avec François Bonenfant autour de *Mon Voyage d'Hiver*', DVD bonus material of *Mon Voyage d'Hiver* (Studio Canal/Les Films de la Croisade, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> See synopsis p. 272.

<sup>6</sup> Vincent Dieutre, 'Entretien de Vincent Dieutre avec François Bonenfant autour de *Mon Voyage d'Hiver*', *op. cit.*

*Mon Voyage*. Likewise, the video camera follows Vincent in dynamic close-up and medium shots. The Caravaggiesque scenes and several night sequences are shot on Super 8 because Dieutre was striving for a particular image grain in an attempt to echo the paintings' texture and physicality.<sup>7</sup> Finally, the filmic apparatus is revealed to the spectator at various stages in both films.

## POINT OF VIEW

This diversity of levels of narration also contributes to establishing a multiplicity of points of view, which, in the specific context of self-representation, raises some questions about the split self, not only across time and space, but also across the different positions of the self as author, narrator, and protagonist. Genette refines the distinction between history and discourse by introducing the notion of focalisation, which he divides into three types. The *focalisation zero* describes a 'non-focalised narrative', akin to the history, while discourse can be described as either *internal focalisation*, or as *external focalisation*, if the narrator does not have any insight into the character's mind.<sup>8</sup>

In *Mon Voyage*, while the differentiated use of analogue (16 mm) and digital formats has implications in terms of narrative levels, the combined use of professional and amateur digital cameras also points to different modes of subjectivity: the first is mostly extra-diegetic and points to external focalisation; the second, Itvan's camcorder, is integrated in the diegesis and lies within internal focalisation so that the shots taken by the teenager seem like furtive incursions of his own point of view in a film dominated –both literally and figuratively – by Vincent's voice. Paradoxically, Vincent never holds the camera but remains the object of the gaze. This difference is particularly well exposed in the following example. At dawn, Itvan is walking along a corridor, followed by the digital camera, and enters the bedroom in which Vincent and his partner Georg are sleeping. This sequence is articulated in the shot-counter-shot mode, so that the next scene is a static take of the bedroom, filmed on 16 mm, which shows Itvan entering with his camcorder and filming the couple. The next scene shows the two men as if filmed by Itvan with the camcorder and, finally, the following shot introduces a static 16 mm take of Itvan leaving the room (figs 9-12).

<sup>7</sup> This point touches on the haptic gaze and is developed in Chapters 5 and 6.

<sup>8</sup> *Internal focalisation* is what Branigan also calls character narration, see footnote n. 1, *Point of View in the Cinema*, *op. cit.*, p. 2; Gérard Genette, *Figures III*, *op. cit.*, p. 206.



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

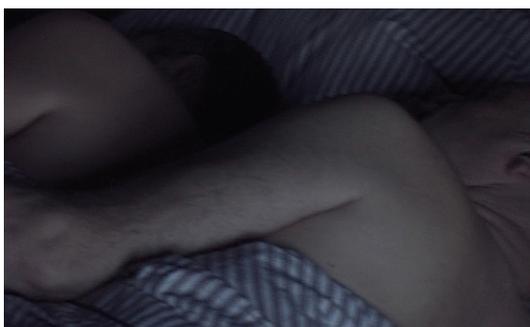


Fig. 11



Fig. 12

***Mon Voyage d'Hiver* (Vincent Dieutre, 2003)**

This sequence clearly establishes the different orders of narration: a situation of *focalisation zero* reveals the scene in the more or less neutral position of the 16 mm camera. The presence of a hypothetical narrator/voyeur (and subsequently the spectator) following Itvan is embodied in the use of the video camera, which conveys external focalisation. Finally, the couple seen through Itvan's gaze or rather, through his camera, is focalised internally to him. Curiously, this instant is used again in one of the last sequences of the film, while Vincent and Itvan are sitting in a café in Weimar. The teenager grabs his camcorder, stands up and starts filming Vincent. However, the counter-shot, instead of showing the latter sitting at the table, consists of a glimpse from the earlier scene of Vincent in bed with Georg. The next one, shot on 16 mm, shows Itvan filming: we then see a deer in the park recorded with a digital camera – presumably by Itvan – from the café's window. The furtive insertion of the intimate bedroom scene in this more trivial sequence suggests Itvan's reminiscence of a moment stolen from Vincent's privacy. This is Vincent *as* Itvan sees him, like spontaneous inserts of his subjectivity facilitated by digital technology.

In his first feature length film, *Rome Désolée* (hereafter referred to as *Rome*)<sup>9</sup> the camera's gaze seems to coincide with Vincent's point of view, thus providing a case of

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<sup>9</sup> See synopsis p. 272.

internal focalisation for he never appears on screen. Yet, the long and relatively static shots of the handheld camera as well as the discrepancy between text and image create a distance, and hint at a narrator situated at an extra-diegetic level. It is as if Vincent's story did not really belong to him, all the more so that the gaze is not embodied. The point of focalisation thus remains uncertain; this ambiguity enhances the character's lack of involvement in the narrative and, ultimately, in the world around him. In *Bologna Centrale* (hereafter referred to as *Bologna*),<sup>10</sup> the situation seems similar at first sight: the camera also focuses on apparently random places in the city. The difference, however, is that his voice is no longer a post-synchronous constructed narrative but is instead spontaneous and recorded directly, as we can hear from the sound quality, even if he only makes rare appearances on screen. This confirms Michel Chion's argument that sound entirely changes the perception of the image.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the major structural change between *Rome* and *Bologna* is the use of sound, which gives an altogether different perception of the point of view expressed through the camera's gaze.

In terms of point of view, *Histoire d'un Secret* is a singular case in Mariana Otero's filmography: her personal involvement necessarily implies her presence onscreen whereas she never appeared in her previous documentaries. As such, the camera's point of view (a case of external focalisation) tended to coalesce with her own, whereby she stood as an external and invisible observer.<sup>12</sup> In *Histoire*, the camera alternates internal with external focalisation: in the first case, it seems to convey Mariana's point of view, for example, when she drives in a forward tracking shot; in the second, it points to an unidentified external narrator. Early in the film, she visits her aunt and uncle, the camera stays outside at first, as if to mark a distance and to emphasise Mariana's role as one among the other protagonists fully involved in this family tragedy. This contrasts with her usual position as external observer, as the director who usually stands outside the frame. For this reason, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to point distinctively to moments of focalisation zero as if, in this situation of strong emotional commitment, there were no space for a so-called neutral focalisation. At the same time, the point of focalisation zero does not really exist in that it always refers to a point of view and, as Branigan rightly argues, 'there is subjectivity

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<sup>10</sup> See synopsis p. 273.

<sup>11</sup> Michel Chion, *Audio-vision: Sound on Screen*, ed. and trans by Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, [1990] 1994), pp. 3-10.

<sup>12</sup> In particular in films like *Cette télévision est la vôtre* (France/Portugal, 1997), or *Non-Lieux* (France, 1991). For the synopsis of *Histoire d'un Secret*, see p. 275.

in every narration, including in the so-called “neutral” shots of a film.’<sup>13</sup> By using the expression *focalisation zero*, Genette answers the difficulty to a certain extent for focalisation zero is always more than no focalisation at all. In any case, the relevance of generally assuming the neutrality or objectivity of a narrative instance, of which the *histoire* partakes, is mainly rhetorical and relative.

On one occasion in *Histoire*, the camera seems to adopt the point of view of an omniscient narrator/observer: Mariana and her sister Isabel visit a house by the coast in which they spent several summers with their grandparents after Clotilde’s death. The entire scene takes place in the garden and at one point, the sisters help each other climb the wall to try and peer into the house through the window. This is immediately followed by the shot, filmed handheld and with a back-light, of a room inside the house (figs 13-14). The juxtaposition of these two scenes provides a shot-counter-shot effect, which suggests two different points of view: in the first, the camera shares the women’s perspective as they are trying to peer inside the house. In the next shot, it reveals the empty house to the spectator from inside, to which they do not seem to have access. This scene is particularly intriguing as the camera refuses to take up the clear point of view usually associated with documentary. As a result, it introduces a connotation of mystery and stands as the very epitome of *the secret*.



Fig. 13

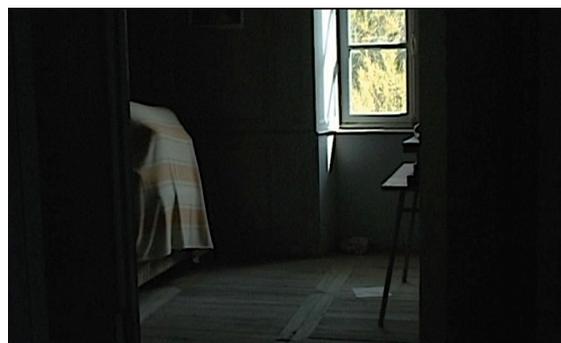


Fig. 14

*Histoire d'un Secret* (Mariana Otero, 2003)

As for other situations of external focalisation, in which the external narrator/observer know less than the protagonists, they are recurrent insofar as Otero creates suspense by revealing only gradually to the spectator the real cause of her mother’s death. The word ‘abortion’ is only pronounced between Antonio and Mariana in the last third of the film. In addition, there is one particularly manifest instance in

<sup>13</sup> Edward Branigan, *Point of View in the Cinema*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

which the camera shifts from external to internal focalisation, when Mariana visits Clotilde's former gynaecologist. During the brief conversation, the camera alternates two types of frame: one, in medium shot, showing the profiles of Mariana and the doctor sitting opposite each other; the other focusing on Mariana filmed in oblique close-up (figs 15-16). As the doctor suggests that certain issues had better be kept in the closet, the camera cuts backwards and then forwards again to focus on Mariana. This shot contrasts with the previous take and thus comes across as internal focalisation, for the eloquence of her silence and her facial expression, which denotes controlled stupefaction, allow the spectator to read her mind like an open book.



Fig. 15



Fig. 16

*Histoire d'un Secret* (Mariana Otero, 2003)

On a different register, Sophie Calle's *Double Blind*, made with her then partner Greg Shepard, relies exclusively on the weaving together of the protagonists' respective travel diaries, something that the title for the English version ironically underscores.<sup>14</sup> Equipped with a video camera each, Calle and Shepard produced their own footage during the journey. The resulting work consists of the confrontation of two opposite points of view carried out by their respective *camera-I*, which are enhanced or sometimes counterbalanced by their voice-over commentaries as two distinct points of focalisation (figs 17-18). Paradoxically, these are simultaneously internal because they convey the character's inner thoughts, and external because they also stand outside the time and space of the journey upon which they reflect retrospectively. This is reinforced by the fact that the camera's subjective point of view does not necessarily overlap with the off-screen voice of the narrator: images of Sophie (thus taken by Greg) are often accompanied by her voice and vice versa.

<sup>14</sup> *Double Blind*, a pun on the expression *double bind*, obviously puts the emphasis on vision and sight, or lack of it for that matter.



Fig. 17



Fig. 18

***Double Blind* (Sophie Calle & Greg Shepard, 1992)**

### SHIFTERS

An analysis of the film's subjectivity in terms of language rather than camera's point of view, that is, in terms of grammatical shifters, would suggest that *Double Blind* is dominated by the confrontation between *I* and *he* from Sophie's perspective and between *I* and *she* from that of Greg. On the second day of the trip for example, Sophie comments in voice over mode on a still image of her sitting in the car: 'It's not even me he's filming, it's his car.' Later, Greg laments during the forward tracking shot of a road at night: 'I'm talking to her and she says nothing. I don't even know if she's listening at this point. I never know if her silence is sincere or if there's some tactic involved.' The absence of communication thus seems extreme, all the more so that they speak a different language, both figuratively and literally (Sophie speaks French to her camera, to Greg's irritation). Greg's use of shifters is more complex than Sophie's because *she* also refers to his car, which he sometimes addresses directly ('Come on honey'). At times, he also talks to himself in the second person:

Sophie's no more ambitious than *you*, she's just upfront about it, she's just being herself and *you*'re holding that against her. [...] Stop looking for Mummy to save *you* and that's it. She commits herself and *you* don't. But I wish I could talk to her about these things [...].

The use of the shifter *you* in this long monologue clearly entails an introspective dimension in keeping with the point made in Chapter 1. As soon as Shepard shifts to his relationship with Sophie, he reverts to the first person. As he explains in the film's prologue, this project does not only have an artistic but also a therapeutic value, not to save the relationship but rather to reinvent himself, as he puts it. By contrast, Sophie's

use of the shifters is in this respect more straightforward, just like her intentions: save her relationship.

Dieutre also addresses himself in the second person in *Leçons*. By providing an introspective mirror, the shifter *you* enhances in a fairly recurrent mode the principle of the split self epitomised by Rimbaud's 'I is an other'. However in this film, *you* also refers on various occasions to Dieutre's partner, Tadeusz, which works towards a sense of confusion between the characters, as we shall see later. For Alisa Lebow,

there is no simple subjectivity, and even deceptively simple representations of the self nonetheless imply an impossibly multiple positionality of subject/object. Thus the project of filmmaking (or rather, mediamaking) always carries with it a challenge to the notion of the unified subject.

Moreover,

[i]f we then link the process of subjective representation to self-representation [...], it quickly becomes clear that it entails a process of becoming both subject and object of the gaze, a somewhat antinomial position that is nonetheless constitutive of being able to reflect upon and represent the self.<sup>15</sup>

This applies particularly well to Dieutre's *Bologna*, in which the verbal narrative relies on two distinct voices. In the opening, middle, and final sequences, he resorts to an off screen extra-diegetic female narrator who refers to him in the third person singular. As usual, the narrative is carefully written and constructed:

On August the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1980, the radio announced the bombing. It was over twenty years ago. He had just left Bologna and had not returned since. Now, he has just left the railway station. [...] He contemplates the dark, massive Bologna Centrale. The rain makes him shiver. [...] As they drive slowly along the arcades of the Via Zamboni, he cannot recognise Vittorio and Sandro's building, in which he spent such beautiful, grave hours [...].

Here, Vincent is presented through the gaze of an external, omniscient narrator. The shifter *he* emphasises the representation of Vincent as simultaneously subject (as the film-maker) and object (as the protagonist Vincent) of the gaze, even if he remains off screen during this monologue. As already mentioned, *Bologna* is the only film in which Dieutre speaks spontaneously to his camera, albeit off screen, here too. Through this intertwining of direct and indirect speech, or of history and discourse, Dieutre seems involved as both protagonist and diegetic narrator and the film marks a shift in his

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<sup>15</sup> Alisa Lebow, *The Cinema of Me*, op. cit., pp. 4-5.

filmography, from a perpetually absent character to an increasingly involved protagonist.

Although the use of shifters raises different issues in the various films of the corpus, it also harks back to the question of the position of the self in relation to the Other, not only as temporal Other, as discussed in the previous chapter, but also as social Other. As Lebow emphasises through her use of first person singular versus plural, the distinction between *I*, on the one hand, and *we*, as well as *you*, *he*, *she*, or *they*, on the other, also points to the connection between the subject and the group in relation to which the former always constitutes him/herself.<sup>16</sup> This is especially the case of Otero in relation to her family in *Histoire* for the narrative structure conditions the presence of different shifters, which unambiguously refer to the different protagonists who reminisce about Clotilde. In other words, the presence of multiple points of view only translates the situation of enunciation, which is a dialogue between Mariana and her different interlocutors on whose testimonies the film can only rely. This direct mode of address is also enhanced by the absence of voice over. *She* is in this sense the emblematic shifter for the absent one: Clotilde.

The same can be argued about Sophie Calle who constantly relies on the intervention of others in nearly all her works, as well as about Dieutre in relation to the other protagonists of his films: Itvan and his old friends in *Mon Voyage*, Tadeusz in *Leçons*. In *Bologna*, this includes the audience on at least one occasion, whereby the direct address to the spectator clearly establishes the scene as a point of view shot:

So, today is Sunday... the weather is extremely beautiful... the city is completely empty... for now... but... yesterday's rain makes the whole thing absolutely shiny, it's wonderful... I just wanted to share this vision with *you* (fig. 19).



<sup>16</sup> Alisa Lebow, *The Cinema of Me*, op. cit., pp. 1-3.

**Fig. 19: *Bologna Centrale* (Vincent Dieutre, 2003)**

On the whole, the self is (re)presented through a multiplication of points of view, which is manifested in the use of different shifters. This points to the notion of a scattered subjectivity in this context of first-person narration, which exceeds Branigan's understanding of it as point of view narration: '[Subjectivity] may be conceived as a specific instance or level of narration where the telling is attributed to a character in the narrative and received by us as if we were in the situation of enunciation of a character.'<sup>17</sup> This definition is too restrictive in the case of self-representational film, in keeping with Lebow's above cited argument, and rules out the positions of both author and narrator, which may stand outside the diegesis. In *Mon Voyage* for instance, while various points of view are given visual expression, the film is dominated by Vincent's subjectivity – as the director and voice over narrator – including the scenes shot on 16 mm. The same can be argued about *Histoire d'un secret* and, similarly in *Double Blind*, one is arguably tempted to think that the film is predominantly authored by Sophie Calle, be it merely for the fact that she is at the origin of the project over which she had the financial control.

## THE VOICE

In line with this, the off-screen voice constitutes perhaps the most notable occurrence of a dispersion of the self as it breaks the unity of space and body. Mary Ann Doane distinguishes two types of off-screen voice: the 'voice-over' and the 'voice-off', and, and before her, Pascal Bonitzer, writing in French, indiscriminately resorts to the commonly used Anglicism 'voix off' to describe both.<sup>18</sup> The voice-over applies to the commentary voice added onto, *over*, the image and is broadly used in the documentary genre; it is an extra-diegetic voice. The voice-off corresponds to the voice of a diegetic character, which may be out of frame but is present in the sequence, partly or fully invisible, such as Vincent's in *Bologna*. Serge Daney, also borrows from the English to make a further distinction, which cuts across those of Doane and Bonitzer, between *voice in* and *voice off*. Daney's definition of the voice off designates in fact

<sup>17</sup> Edward Branigan, *Point of View in the Cinema, op. cit.*, p. 73.

<sup>18</sup> Mary Ann Doane, 'The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation between Body and Space', *Yale French Studies*, 60 (1980), 33-50, p. 37; Pascal Bonitzer, 'Les Silences de la Voix', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 256 (February-March, 1975), 22-33.

what Doane refers to as the voice-over: 'I shall call voice off, *stricto sensu*, that which is always parallel to the unfolding to the images, which never intersects with it'. The *voice in*, on the contrary, is 'the voice which, *as such*, intervenes in the image, interferes with it ('*s'y im-misce*', *sic*), leaves the mark in its material impact, of a visual double.'<sup>19</sup> This reflects the opposition between extra-diegetic and diegetic voice overs. Within the latter category, Daney distinguishes again two types of voice: the *voice out*, 'the voice as it comes out of the mouth' and the *voice through*

that which is emitted within the image but outside the spectacle of the mouth. A certain type of framing, [...] the decision to film the characters from behind, sideways or in three-quarter length, the multiplication of what blocks the vision [...] are enough to disconnect the voice from the mouth.<sup>20</sup>

This latter category is also what Doane calls the voice-off while Michel Chion uses the term *acousmètre* to designate acousmatic occurrences.<sup>21</sup>

In the light of these distinctions, the voices in *Double Blind* are a mix of in and off screen voices. To be more precise, two are off screen, the voice-over and the voice through/voice-off (in Doane's sense); and, more seldom, one is onscreen, the voice out, as Daney defines it. On one such rare occasion, they are having a conversation inside the car, Greg is driving. One of the cameras is placed between the two front seats and shows Sophie in a low-angle static shot, so that Greg is speaking off frame. This is a good example of combined *voice out* (Sophie) and *voice through* (Greg) modes. From a metaphoric point of view, this reflects the couple's lack of communication because when they do talk, what stands out is a sense of disconnection. Given the technical apparatus (one camera each), with a few notable exceptions, Greg and Sophie hardly ever appear on screen at the same time, so that, in a way or another, one of their voices is bound to be acousmatic and detached from its respective body.

Moreover, given the low quality of the recorded material, images in movement could only be taken inside the car, while the sequences outside the car (the various stops of the journey) are still shots to which the soundtrack was added retrospectively, thus generating an interesting collage. This soundscape includes the synchronous enviroing noise; Sophie and Greg's own *voices in*; those of other people (restaurant customers or

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<sup>19</sup> Serge Daney, 'L'Orgue et l'Aspirateur', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 279-280 (August-September, 1977), 18-27, p. 24 (my translation as in all further quotations of this text).

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*, p. 26.

<sup>21</sup> Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, ed. & trans. by Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, [1982] 1999). However the acousmètre does not exclusively apply to cinema, it can also be, among other possibilities, a radio voice or a 'person you talk to on the phone, whom you've never seen', p. 21.

staff members, the mechanics, etc.). Such diegetic sounds are intertwined with the protagonists' voice over comments, which appear as amusing theatrical asides. While the images' stillness enhances the relevance of the ongoing diegetic sound, these scenes are also quite singular because they raise paradoxical issues. On the one hand, the diegetic and spontaneous sound seems to animate the frozen images, to give them an illusion of movement, and to extend the space beyond the confinement of the image's fixity, which somehow epitomises the protagonists' own emotional imprisonment. On the other hand, the discrepancy between the still image and the continuous spontaneous sounds results in an even starker sense of disconnection, which naturally reinforces the disunion of the protagonists' bodies. In this respect, Sophie's leitmotiv, *no sex last night*, repeated at the end of each stopover, beyond the ironic and temporal punctuation it marks throughout the film, is also a literal observation about their absence of physical contact.

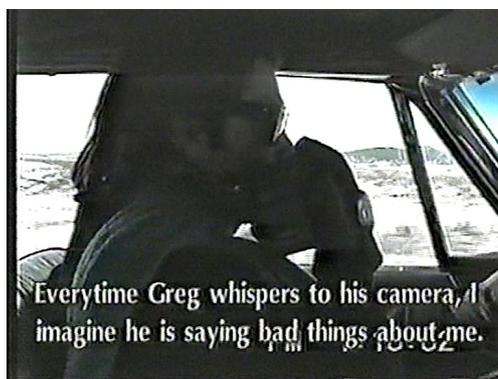
The predominant type of voice is thus the voice over, which assumes the role of a *metanarrative*, to paraphrase Serge Daney:<sup>22</sup> Sophie and Greg confide to their respective camera to comment on the situation. Moreover, echo has been added to the voices over, which emphasises the contrast with the voice in. This effect denotes perhaps less the ghostliness of the voices, as if coming from beyond the grave to haunt the image, than a playful use of echo in order to simulate internal thoughts, which is not that different from the effects produced in comedy.

At one point, Greg is talking to his camera while driving (fig. 20). Sophie's voice over remark about the scene is eloquent: 'every time Greg whispers to his camera, I imagine he is saying bad things about me'. And indeed, her comment is interrupted by Greg's off-screen whispering in which he lets out his resentment towards her. These two off-screen monologues respond to each other in a kind of retrospective exchange, precisely the one that they could not have during the journey. The dissonance of their discourse, the sterility of this dialogue of the deaf is such that their voices are sometimes superimposed onto each other. Overall, the voice serves as a metaphoric emphasis on the couple's inability to communicate: when all possibilities of dialogue have been exhausted, each confides to the camera. Furthermore, as many of the comments were added during the editing stage, they are like spectators of themselves, reflecting upon the failure of their relationship in an attempt to eventually overcome it.

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<sup>22</sup> Serge Daney, 'L'Orgue et l'Aspirateur', *op. cit.*: 'This voice [the voice off], retrospectively superimposed onto the image, mounted on it, is only capable of metalanguage. It only addresses [...] the spectator, with whom it forms an alliance, a contract, on the image's back' (my translation), p. 24.

In this sense, the retrospective nature of the voice-over comment also has a therapeutic function.



**Fig. 20: *Double Blind* (Sophie Calle & Greg Shepard, 1992)**

The relation between voice and body on screen also hints at the broader relation between sound and image of course. As the introduction of sound in cinema brought about the ‘possibility of re-presenting a fuller (and organically unified) body’, as Doane points out, the voice also drew attention to space: ‘just as the voice must be anchored by a given body, the body must be anchored in a given space’; that is, a ‘fantasmatic visual space’, which is constructed by the film thanks to the technical apparatus so that the sound seems to emanate from the image on screen for the spectator in the theatre.<sup>23</sup> Once the novelty of sound had worn out, the spatial unity of image and sound quickly appeared as natural. Claude Bailblé, Chion, Doane, and many others have pointed to the opposition between the physical limitation of the image through the frame and the relative ubiquity of sound, which is, by essence, diffuse. Thus, in *Double Blind*, what the relation between the voices in and off screen also stresses is the dichotomy between the space inside the car (confined, limited) and outside the car (vast, unlimited), as we shall see in the next chapter. Bailblé argues that the delusive dimension of sound is width (*‘largeur’*) while that of the image is the depth of field. In addition, by a process of mutual support, sound controls the image’s depth through the measured use of reverberation while the image deals with the sound’s breadth of field (that is, parasite peripheral sounds) thanks to the frame.<sup>24</sup> In other words, the frame contains, delineates the soundscape. In this context, the voice over plays a determinant role in undermining the unity between image and sound for it obviously points to the invisible space beyond the frame, that unlimited space off screen. For Doane, ‘[t]he traditional use of voice-off

<sup>23</sup> Mary Ann Doane, ‘The Voice in the Cinema’, *op. cit.*, pp. 34; 36.

<sup>24</sup> Claude Bailblé, ‘Programmation de l’écoute (4)’, *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 299 (April, 1979), 16-27, p. 25.

constitutes a denial of the frame as a limit and an affirmation of the unity and homogeneity of the depicted space'.<sup>25</sup> Although she is talking specifically about the voice-off, that is, the diegetic acousmatic voice, it applies all the more so to the extra-diegetic voice over, which is 'necessarily presented outside of that [diegetic] space'.<sup>26</sup> Thus, it 'resonates off screen, in other words, in the Other's space'.<sup>27</sup>

As a device added retrospectively during editing, the voice over generally underscores the different temporalities at work in the film-making process. In addition, in diegetic terms, the off-camera space generated by the off screen voice can also be temporal. In Dieutre's films, especially in *Rome Désolée* and *Bologna Centrale*, the voice over points indeed to the past. At first sight, the voice in *Rome* could be described as a so-called typical documentary voice over: the disembodied commentary voice of an external narrator, especially as Vincent never appears onscreen. However, the spectator soon realises that there is no direct relation between what s/he sees and s/he hears. In fact, there seems to be a complete discrepancy between image and textual narrative, so that the voice points all the more explicitly to an outer temporal space. On the one hand, images of Rome are woven together with television footage (essentially newsreel images of the first war in Iraq and advertisements), and only seem to convey an absence of purpose. On the other, the spoken narrative sounds like a literary diary about the years Vincent spent in Rome in the early eighties. It revolves essentially around his aimless wanderings in the city punctuated by casual sexual encounters, issues of drug addiction and lack of money, as well as his general sense of doom. As a result, the voice over takes the spectator to the past while the images show contemporary Rome. Yet, because the story is told in the present tense, Dieutre maintains a sense of confusion between the different temporalities by bringing his past into the frame as a present thanks to this present tense.

Traditionally, the voice over also tends to be ascribed an authoritative connotation because of its disembodiment: 'nothing or no one can criticise [it], in so far as no one can localise it' as Bonitzer puts it.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, coldness and distance seem characteristic of the commentator's authoritative and assertive voice, 'the cold voice of order, normality, and power'.<sup>29</sup> In *Rome*, however, Vincent's detached tone as he tells

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<sup>25</sup> Mary Ann Doane, 'The Voice in the Cinema', *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>26</sup> *Id.*, p. 38

<sup>27</sup> Pascal Bonitzer, 'Les Silences de la Voix', *op. cit.*, p. 24 (my translation).

<sup>28</sup> Pascal Bonitzer, 'Les Silences de la Voix', *op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>29</sup> *Id.*, p. 27.

his intimate story does not correspond to an expression of normality and power but, quite on the contrary, contributes to enhancing the sense of disconnection between the marginal, homosexual drug addict and the world surrounding him (especially as he remains off screen, as already mentioned).<sup>30</sup> Image and text have no apparent correlation either and in fact, if it provides a metanarrative at all, it is a silent one as it points to everything that Vincent does not disclose. As a result, the discrepancy thereby created between image and text opens up a space for the images to speak, as it were. In his text, eloquently titled *The Silences of the Voice*,<sup>31</sup> Bonitzer talks about Buñuel's *Las Hurdes* (Spain, 1933), a short documentary about people barely surviving in the utmost misery in 1930s Spain: 'the commentary in it is cold but the image screams. On the image, it croaks, it rots, it scowls atrociously [...]'.<sup>32</sup> To a lesser extent, this could not apply better to *Rome*. Although the poverty and desolation exposed in it by no means compares to the villagers' horrendous agony denounced by Buñuel, Dieutre's film, whose title alone, *desolate Rome*, is significant enough, abounds in shots of wastelands and derelict quarters.

Thus, where image and voice implicitly reunite is in the evocation of marginal communities: Vincent and his friends, other drug addicts and gays hit by AIDS during the eighties, as well as the poor, the homeless, the beggars. The coldness and distance of Vincent's voice suddenly acquires a different dimension, it echoes not only the drug addict's lack of interest in and absence of involvement in the world around him, but also society's own indifference towards those forgotten souls, hence the insertion of trivial television advertisements amidst images of this *desolate* society. As the voice over highlights the space beyond the frame, by the same token, the lack of correspondence between image and voice also draws the spectator's attention to the space in-between images, as Blümlinger precisely argues with respect to the essay film, thus pointing to the inexpressible, to the silence of Vincent's comment, encrypted in the crudeness of his language.

Dieutre systematically resorts to the voice over and, just as in *Rome*, the voice over narrative in *Leçons*, *Mon Voyage*, and sometimes in *Bologna*, is a literary and constructed narrative. However, while the voice's status in *Rome* is relatively simple, it becomes more complex in his other films. In *Mon Voyage*, it is written as a letter

<sup>30</sup> The film's structure is reminiscent of Chantal Ackerman's *News from Home* (France/USA, 1976). About Dieutre's detached tone, critic Stéphane Bouquet went as far as to describe it as almost disdainful. See 'Homo Cinématographique', *Les Cahiers du Cinéma*, 499, (February, 1996), p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> Pascal Bonitzer, 'Les Silences de la Voix', *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>32</sup> *Id.*, p. 31.

directly addressed to Itvan. Dialogue is sparse and the soundtrack is mainly composed of Vincent's voice over, music, and a series of poems recited in front of the camera by the other characters. As already mentioned, the voice in *Leçons* is a direct address, either to himself or to Tadeusz, and the stories told revolve once again around Vincent's relationships. *Bologna Centrale* returns to the themes developed in *Rome*, that is Vincent's first experiences with love and drugs. His rare and silent appearances are more like apparitions. With one exception, they all take place in the obscurity of his hotel room in which the viewer only guesses his silhouette as he is lying in bed, smoking, or holding the telephone. The separation of body and voice brings the effect of a dematerialised and unreal, almost ghostly, presence in the city. This impression underlines the nature of his journey: the evocation of a past that no longer is, of people who have died since, and of a city he barely recognises. The final sequence is the only one in which Vincent's body and voice eventually coincide, when he appears for the first time in broad daylight and reads out the names of the victims of the 1980 bombing inscribed on a commemorative stonewall at the railway station (fig. 21). And yet, he is talking with his back to the camera (in voice off mode) while the image starts to shake, as a metaphor, perhaps, of the fragility of the unity between body and voice.



**Fig. 21: Bologna Centrale (Vincent Dieutre, 2003)**

Interestingly, *Histoire d'un secret*, the only film in this corpus explicitly presented by its author as a documentary, is the only one that does not resort to the voice over strategy. The film's voices *in* are those of the relatives, friends, and different witnesses who knew Clotilde. According to the film's screenplay, Otero originally intended to include a voice over, to give the film a 'poetic and subjective tone', but decided against

it in the end.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps because, since Clotilde was a painter, the emphasis was to be put on visual rather than verbal expression. To come back to Bonitzer's point about the authority of the voice over, he adds that it 'represents a power, that of disposing of the image and of what it reflects, from a space absolutely *other* with respect to that inscribed in the image-track'.<sup>34</sup> In this context, it could be that the film-maker chose to not include a voice over to avoid such an authoritative position as an external narrator. This emphasises all the more so her involvement in the film as merely one among the other protagonists, especially as she is the least qualified to speak about her mother given her absence of memories of the latter. As she explained in an interview, she did not want to be perceived by her relatives (especially her father) as judging or condemning them for having kept the secret, which could have been the case, had she remained exclusively behind the camera.<sup>35</sup> In this sense, it seems, she chose to undermine the importance of the *authorial* voice in favour of a more collective one.

She certainly could have articulated her mother's death from a more individual perspective, precisely around her lack of memories for instance. This is how Italian director Alina Marazzi deals with a similar family tragedy, when she reads off screen the letters and diaries that her mother, Liseli Hoepli, wrote before committing suicide at the age of thirty-four in 1972, having suffered from severe depression for several years (*Un'Ora Sola ti Vorrei*, Italy, 2002). At the time, Marazzi was seven years old. She also introduces the films with an imaginary letter as though sent by Liseli from beyond the grave. The voice over is superimposed onto the family's home movies of which the film is almost exclusively composed.<sup>36</sup> By adopting Liseli's point of view in the spoken narrative, Marazzi gives a voice back to the silent body of her mother onscreen. In comparison, Otero adopts a symmetrically opposite approach as she focuses instead on those who have remained after Clotilde's death, namely her father, sister, the extended family, and friends. As a documentary-maker whose work always focused on social issues, her choice to involve her relatives and, most importantly, to investigate on the

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<sup>33</sup> 'Rencontre Mariana Otero/Vincent Dieutre' interviewed by François Caillat and Frédéric Goldbronn, in *Le style dans le cinéma documentaire: Réflexions sur le style, Entretiens et contributions*, ed. by Guy Baudon, Anne Baudry, Jean-Louis Baudry, *et al.* (Paris: ADDOC/L'Harmattan, 2006), pp. 107-137 (p. 117). The script of Otero's film is included in the volume: Mariana Otero, 'Scénario d'*Histoire d'un Secret*' (pp. 71-103).

<sup>34</sup> Pascal Bonitzer, 'Les Silences de la Voix', *op. cit.*, p. 26 (translation borrowed from Mary Ann Doane, 'The Voice in the Cinema', *op. cit.*, p. 42).

<sup>35</sup> Rebecca Manzoni, 'Interview with Mariana Otero', *op. cit.*

<sup>36</sup> With the exception of several sequences for which Marazzi photographed Liseli's diaries, letters, and the numerous medical reports, the film entirely relies on the rich collection of footage that her grandfather shot on 16 mm and Super 8 from 1929 onwards.

taboo of illegal abortion is in keeping with her filmography. And since Antonio was the sole beholder of the secret, *Histoire d'un secret* is not merely her personal story but involves the entire family.<sup>37</sup> This ties in with Lebow's argument about the 'first person' as simultaneously singular and plural:

By not specifying which form is to be privileged, we allow the resonances to reverberate between the I and the we – to imagine indeed that one doesn't speak without the other, that in fact the 'I' inheres in the 'we', if not vice versa.<sup>38</sup>

*Histoire d'un secret* is the very manifestation of this plural first person whereby the film gives a voice to all the people who knew Clotilde and who also suffered from her death.

## SELF-FICTION

Among the other implications of multiple point of view narration in personal films, one should include the ambivalence between fabrication and authenticity. For example, Dieutre's use of different cameras – in particular, the combination of professional and amateur formats – and the revelation of their presence corroborate the balancing act between *mise en scène* and *reality effect*. The multiple points of view work towards fiction, but at the same time, they contribute to representing the self from different angles. By providing an alternative perspective to Vincent's, the points of view of other protagonists also complete the image of his fictionalised character, for instance, Vincent as Itvan sees him in *Mon Voyage*. Paradoxically however, these other points of view, as secondary and trivial asides, are precisely what authenticates the narrative and call to mind what Barthes defined as the reality effect:

Realistic literature is narrative, of course, but that is because its realism is only fragmentary, erratic, confined to 'details', and because the most realistic narrative imaginable develops along unrealistic lines. [...] The very absence of the signified, to the advantage of the referent alone, becomes the very signifier of realism: the *reality effect* (sic) is produced [...].<sup>39</sup>

What is understood as the signified here is the narrative structure; hence the inclusion of trivial and *a priori* insignificant scenes, shot by Itvan for example, which partake of this

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<sup>37</sup> Otero was able to count on her family's full collaboration and support whereas Marazzi encountered some resistance among her relatives when she decided to make her film.

<sup>38</sup> Alisa Lebow, *The Cinema of Me*, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The Reality Effect' [1968], *The Rustle of language*, Berkeley; L.A.: University of California Press, 1989, pp. 141-148 (pp. 147-148).

very reality effect. The same can be posited about the other films, which resort to different strategies to playfully alternate fiction and pretensions of authenticity. Ironically, in *Mon Voyage*, it is the old amateur format, the 16 mm camera that enhances the fictive, ‘cinematic’ connotation while the digital cameras (including the camcorder) underline the real, documentary aspect in the film. Meanwhile, the predominance of Vincent’s subjectivity brings documentary reality to the fore. In *Bologna* as well, Dieutre maintains this ambiguity between, on the one hand, fiction, through the presence of an extra-diegetic narrator, and, on the other, the authentic travel diary style, underlined by the point-of-view shots of the handheld camera and his direct mode of address to the camera.

The strategy of self-representation through dispersion and ambivalence between fictional and documentary narrative forms, which also applies to Sophie Calle and Mariana Otero’s respective works, is the consequence of the statement that self-representation is intrinsically complex and problematic, if not impossible. The term *autofiction* (self-fiction) was coined by Serge Doubrovsky in his autobiographical novel *Fils* (which ambiguously translates as *son(s)* and *threads*):

Autobiography? No. This is a privilege reserved to the great ones of this world at the end of their life and in a beautiful style. Fiction, of events and of strictly real facts; *self-fiction* if you like, of having entrusted the language of an adventure to the adventure of language, outside wisdom and outside the syntax of the novel, be it traditional or new.<sup>40</sup>

As soon as experience is put into words, it acquires, for Doubrovsky, an existence of its own, parallel and related to the events lived, but autonomous, which resonates with De Man’s stance on autobiography. In *Fils*, the author does away with chronological temporality and basic syntactic rules, juxtaposing instead fragmented sentences without punctuation, like snapshots, with irregular spaces between words. This shifts the focus from content to rhythm in an alternation of accelerating and slowing down movements and is in this sense very close to musical and cinematic structures. Self-fiction is thus the acknowledgement of the autobiographical project as a reconstruction, which bears the awareness of its own impossibility. In a similar vein, Louis-René des Forêts writes in the introduction to his autobiography that ‘there is what no one saw or knew, except for the one who tries to translate, amidst the torment of words, the secret that his

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<sup>40</sup> Serge Doubrovsky, *Fils* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), p. 10 (my translation).

memory refuses'.<sup>41</sup> Thus, self-fiction is a symptom of the crisis at work in self-exposure, as well as the artist's acknowledgment of this crisis. It is not a coincidence that Vincent Dieutre quotes des Forêts in the opening of *Leçons*. Self-fiction can therefore be understood as a process of self-representation that translates events and memory into words or images, as a process of reconstruction and (re-)invention of the self, in the impossibility to represent it *exactly*, as developed in the previous chapter. For Jean-Paul Quéinnec, it is a process in which the *I* drifts away from the self.<sup>42</sup> Among Dieutre's films discussed here, if *Leçons* and *Mon Voyage* seem more explicitly fictional because of the presence of other protagonists and because of their more elaborate narrative, his entire work relies on a strategy of self-invention.

Self-fiction is also central to Calle's artistic approach, which is articulated around the balance between exhibitionism and voyeurism, control and loss of this control. To do so, she ambiguously stages her persona using real and fictional elements, so that the spectator never quite knows if her *mises en scène* are invented or drawn from real events of her life. This said, self-fiction undermines the question of authenticity in favour of that of construction. In other words, irrespective of the veracity of the facts, what the audience retains is that the self *as it is represented* is, and can only be, the result of a narrative construction. By using the self as a playground – in the sense here of a space for experimentation – self-fiction raises a recurrent issue epitomised by the avant-garde (among which, the situationists): the desire to fuse art and life based on the fact that art would otherwise be reduced to mere representation, that is, a product of consumption, a commodity.<sup>43</sup> This stance was taken on by the artistic movements of the 1960s and 1970s, from Maya Deren to Stan Brakhage, to Jonas Mekas, to Vito Acconci to name only a few, a heritage claimed by both Sophie Calle and Vincent Dieutre. Tracy Emin, whose work also falls within this strategy, sums up this position rather well: '[s]o much of people's life isn't there in what they do, they have a veneer over their work and no association to it apart from the fact that they do it.'<sup>44</sup>

Although using a different approach, Mariana Otero also relies on strategies of

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<sup>41</sup> Louis-René des Forêts, *Ostinato* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), p. 13 (my translation).

<sup>42</sup> Jean-Paul Quéinnec, 'Journal de Voyages Intimes chez Vincent Dieutre', in Véronique Campan & Catherine Rannoux, *Le Journal aux Frontières de l'art* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2005), pp. 195-211.

<sup>43</sup> Vincent Kaufmann, 'Life by the Letter', trans. by Caren Litherland, *October*, 64 (Spring, 1993), 91-105, pp. 94-95.

<sup>44</sup> Tracy Emin quoted by Rose Aidin 'Visual Art: The Business of Being Tracy: Does she Embroider her Own Blankets? What is the Price of her Work? Rose Aidin Asks some Burning Questions', *Independent on Sunday*, section Visual Arts, 22 April, 2001, p. 4.

reconstruction. Because she has no memory of her mother and this period of her childhood, she necessarily rebuilds her past in front of the camera, in a documentary mode, admittedly, but also by introducing elements characteristic of fictional narrative structures. This said, if the resort to a script allows a comparison with fiction, one cannot compare the protagonists to actors. Although Otero had carefully planned each scene – from the opening sequence to the last, which sees her mother’s work revived in a public exhibition –, these had not been rehearsed. This means that she heard her relatives’ testimonies for the very first time in front of the camera. The screenplay thus only provided a structuring frame to set the conversation in motion but each protagonist freely told his/her story. Moreover, most of them still did not know the truth before the process of making the film; Otero thus literally breaks the news in front of the camera to her aunt and uncle who had always believed – or pretended to – that Clotilde had died of appendicitis. While the first secret – her death – is disclosed almost immediately at the start of the film, the second secret – abortion as the real cause of her death – is spelt out much later in the film, as already mentioned. With his back to the camera, Mariana’s father explains how, fearing that it might slow down or even ruin her career, Clotilde decided to have an abortion when she discovered that she was pregnant. His revelations are so elliptic that the spectator can only guess what happened before the difficult word *abortion* is reluctantly blurted out. To come back to the participants’ performance, Otero justified the absence of rehearsals by the desire to allow for a certain degree of spontaneity so as to counterweight the artificiality generated by the presence of the filmic paraphernalia. This is also obviously characteristic of documentary aesthetics. However, she also acknowledges that it is the very presence of the apparatus that prompted her and the other protagonists to talk. To some extent, the film has a performative function in the linguistic sense, as defined by Austin in the context of performative speech: *words that do instead of describe*.<sup>45</sup> By triggering revelations and answers to questions more than simply laying them out, Otero’s film *does instead of describes* and thereby set forces into motion. In this sense, it does not merely retrace an investigation but becomes *the* investigation itself.

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<sup>45</sup> J. L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

## STRUCTURES OF INVESTIGATION AND NARRATIVE TENSION

To come back to Sophie Calle, the *mises en scène* of her life resulting from the ambiguity between reality and self-invention that pervades her art often translate into a narrative structure of the detective story. For a retrospective held at the Centre Pompidou in 2003, she organised her works around several categories among which one was entitled ‘Shadowings, Investigations, and Disappearances’. In 1980, she randomly followed a man in Venice (*Suite Vénitienne*); a year later, she asked her mother to hire a private detective to shadow her (*La Filature/The Detective*); the experience was repeated twenty years later at the initiative of her gallery agent (*Vingt Ans Après/Twenty Years Later*). In the same period, Calle played again a detective when she worked as a hotel chambermaid for three weeks in Venice, whereby she spied on the guests, searched through their personal belongings, taking notes and photographs (*L’Hôtel*).<sup>46</sup> While such *mises en scène* are examined from various angles in the following chapters, it is interesting to note that the shadowing series also allow her to play with the multiplication of points of view. *La Filature*, for instance, is divided in three parts: notes from Calle’s diary; the detective’s report accompanied by photographs of the ‘shadowed subject’; the third section is slightly more unexpected for the spectator learns in the end that Calle, unaware of the exact day of her shadowing, asked a friend to watch her house so as to identify the detective and follow him. As a result, the shadower was in turn shadowed and photographed.<sup>47</sup> Her shadowing series do not stage a crime scene *per se*, but her play with different points of view evokes Peter Wollen’s argument, following which there are

four elementary subject positions that we can take up in relation to the scene of the crime: those of the detective, the criminal, the victim, and the onlooker. The detective sees the crime scene as a place of obsessive curiosity, observation, and interpretation. The criminal sees the crime scene as a place of ritual transgression, the site of manic enjoyment, and accomplishment of evil. The victim, dead, sees nothing. [...] The onlooker sees the scene as a place of transient spectacle, the site of morbid fantasy and distracting shock.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> All these are works described in more detail in the appendix, see p. 260.

<sup>47</sup> This reversal of points of view between voyeur and exhibitionist is a frequent issue in her work and the above mentioned retrospective was also articulated around this question of reciprocal gaze between the artist and the audience, as we shall see below.

<sup>48</sup> Peter Wollen, ‘Vectors of Melancholy’, in *Scene of the Crime*, exhibition catalogue ed. by Ralph Rugoff, UCLA & Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center (23 July-5 October 1997) (Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 1997), pp. 23-36 (p. 26).

In her parodical series, Calle is simultaneously the detective and the criminal who subjects her victims to her voyeurism, that is, the hotel guests, the man followed in Venice, the hired detective, and sometimes, as we shall see in Chapter 6, the audience as well. Calle emphasises by the same token the tenuity of the boundaries between the criminal and the detective, the in-between character par excellence whose status is often transgressive, as recurrently portrayed in film noir. As for the onlooker, it is also the audience of course. Overall, Calle focuses on the voyeur's position equally held here by the hired detective, the audience, and herself as the instigator of the performance. This game results in a *mise en abyme* of the voyeuristic act through a multiplication, and thus scattering of the gaze, which entails a degree of reciprocity.

Otero's investigative approach is, by contrast, nowhere near parody and her film resolutely articulates the personal and intimate around the attempt to resolve an enigma. If what is at stake is evidently not to discover *who killed Clotilde*, the film's narrative is certainly prompted by the desire to explain *what* killed her and how it happened. In this sense, as a documentary in its own right, the film has a pragmatic purpose, not unlike *Double Blind*, and consists in uncovering and revealing a secret that remained taboo for twenty years. However, it is precisely this investigative approach that gives the film a fictional turn: given Otero's lack of memories of her mother, the film stages an implicit quest in which the spectators, along with the hypothetical external narrator, the *onlookers*, only discover the truth gradually.

As Wollen aptly reminded, Michel Butor pointed out that 'any detective story is constructed on two murders', the first being perpetrated by the murderer and only serving to trigger the second one, for which the murderer becomes the detective's own victim through the 'explosion of truth'.<sup>49</sup> Without taking this proposition to the letter, what this points to is that the narrative structure of the detective story is always based on 'a double story, the story of an investigation end[ing] with the telling of another story embedded in it, the story of a crime. The narrative of one story concludes with the narration of another.'<sup>50</sup> Thus, while *Histoire d'un Secret* is not a detective story *stricto sensu*, it is built along similar lines: the resolution, as it were, of Clotilde's death and the circumstances that led to it prompts the second story: the celebration of her work as a painter. By a tragic twist of irony, Clotilde, who is the victim in this story, would have been considered the criminal in 1968 for abortion was punishable by law in France until

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<sup>49</sup> Michel Butor, *Passing Time* [1956], trans. by Jean Stewart (London: Faber & Faber, 1961), p. 134.

<sup>50</sup> Peter Wollen, 'Hybrid Plots in *Psycho*', *Framework*, 13 (Autumn, 1980), 14-16, p. 14.

its legalisation in 1975. This explains the secrecy maintained around her death because Antonio also risked imprisonment. In retrospect, the criminal is a collective entity: a patriarchal society that imposed a law restricting women's freedom to control of their bodies.

The presence of external focalisation to convey the narrative helps to sustain the mystery, which is progressively dissipated. The film, especially in the first half, relies on tension and suspense until the ensuing final resolution binds together the two stories: the resolution of the secret and Clotilde's work as a painter. *Histoire* opens with a car driving under the rain on the motorway. The tracking shot of the road ahead is taken from inside the vehicle so that the image and the car's windscreen coalesce into a single frame. However, the regular to and fro movements of the windscreen wipers remind the viewer that the frame is also that of the car (fig. 22). In the next shot, the extended frame also includes the rear-view mirror reflecting the driver's image: the director herself (fig. 23). The title's announcement provides a transition from the motorway to a country road; a tracking shot lingers on a Calvary and shifts back to the road, this time in a panoramic movement (fig. 24), until the car eventually stops by an old, seemingly uninhabited house.



Fig. 22



Fig. 23



Fig. 24



Fig. 25

*Histoire d'un Secret* (Mariana Otero, 2003)

The spectator, akin to the detective, tries to make sense of the enigma and can only guess retrospectively that it is the old family house. Presumably, this first trip represents the director's drive from Paris, where she lives, to Normandy, to the family house where her mother's paintings are kept. In the next scene, Mariana opens the shutters and takes dusty paintings from the walls, at which point the suspense dissolves to introduce the spectator into the core of the story. Up to that point, all the ingredients are present to build up the atmosphere of a thriller: the grey sky and heavy rain, the initial point of view shot of a hypothetical onlooker as well as the glimpse in the mirror and, last but not least, the mysterious abandoned house in the middle of nowhere. Furthermore, these elements also work towards the investigative structure: the car journey embodies the retracing of the death; the house represents a sort of generic crime scene (fig. 25), in particular as the archival place that potentially contains hidden clues and where reminders (the paintings) of the deceased mother had been locked.

Calle also plays at building narrative tension and it is perhaps in her installation *Douleur Exquise* that this is more strikingly manifest, although it is not an investigative narrative. The installation was presented for the first time in 2003 for Calle's retrospective at the Centre Pompidou, and constituted the exhibition's most significant piece in terms of size. It deals with a heartbreak following a three-month stay in Japan in 1984. As Calle explains in the introduction, a scholarship to spend three months in Japan meant that she would have to be away from her partner – called M. – for exactly ninety-two days, as she specifies. After this period, they were due to reunite in India. When the artist eventually arrives at the hotel in Delhi, she learns by way of a telegram that her partner is no longer coming. The installation is divided in three parts. The first, 'Before the Pain', focuses on the stay in Japan: photographs, pages from her passport, letters to her lover, and so forth, alternate in a horizontal sequence on the wall. Yet, everything points to her impatience to reunite with M. Each document is stamped in red ink indicating the numbers of days remaining before her trip to India, so that the documents shown build up a kind of countdown calendar: 'Douleur J-92'; ... J-91; ... J-90 (fig. 26).<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, the different language versions point to different narrative temporalities as different modalities of story-telling in the way they play with anticipation or, on the contrary, with retrospection. In English, the text reads as '*n* days to happiness', thus sustaining the suspense by evoking the moment before the pain, whereas the French version, gives away the clue through the word *douleur* (pain). The

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<sup>51</sup> J, stands for *jour* (day).

other two sections of *Douleur Exquise* consist of a nameless space reconstituted as a hotel room, but which could have been named ‘The Moment of Pain’<sup>52</sup> (fig. 68, p. 158), and a third space called ‘After the Pain’, which focuses on Calle’s recovery.<sup>53</sup>



Fig. 26: *Douleur Exquise*, Sophie Calle, 2003

In terms of narrative and temporal structure, *Douleur Exquise* is built like a classic tale: the countdown of the first part builds suspense and momentum that enhance the shock of the unspeakable (and therefore untitled) moment of pain, while the third section corresponds to the resolution of the plot: ‘will she overcome her grief?’

### SELF-REPRESENTATION: A CONSTELLATION OF NARRATIVES

The examples discussed here show that self-representation is constructed through a multiplicity of points of view, therefore voices, therefore subjects, which ties in with Lebow’s argument about the plurality of the first person, but which is expressed here through a variety of shifters. Sophie Calle and Vincent Dieutre similarly rely on voice-over narration and on the technical device, often revealed to the spectator, to enhance the diversity points of view, while Otero weaves together the narratives of her social circle. She rejects the authoritative position of the voice over to rely instead on a strategy of external focalisation. Her mode of self-representation thus shifts from the personal story to the collective one prompted by the investigative narrational register, in keeping with the documentary tradition to which she belongs. For Dieutre, to present the self as an Other is a way to circumvent the limitation of language following which the shifter ‘I’ confines the subject in an all too restrictive *here-and-now*. The dichotomy

<sup>52</sup> Or *The Location of Pain*, as in the catalogue of the exhibition *M’as-Tu Vue*. Cécile Camart, ‘Catalogue Raisonné des Œuvres’ *M’as-Tu Vue*, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Xavier Barral/Centre Pompidou, 2003), pp. 433-436 (p. 433).

<sup>53</sup> These latter two will be discussed in Chapter 5.

I/he in *Bologna* or I/you in *Leçons de Ténèbres* allows him to take distance and reflects the complexity of the identity process. At the same time, it creates discrepancies between image and sound that draw attention to the space in-between the images. For Sophie Calle, the presence of two different subjects in *Double Blind*, and of several ones in most of her other works, as we shall see, is very representative of her need for an Other against whom she can position herself. Similarly in performances such as the shadowing series, she multiplies the voyeuristic gazes by diversifying the points of view over which she keeps the ultimate control. This multiplication of perspectives suggests an extension in space that goes beyond the frame and reaches out to the audience. In a sense, Calle approaches alterity in spatial terms as she marks her territory whereas Dieutre questions this notion in temporal terms as well, if not more. As for Otero, her strategy lies in-between the latter for she sets forces into motion whose outcome is not predictable. Despite the differences between the different cases studied here, the multiplication of points of view allows them all to initiate, each in their own way, a quest, which starts with the dispersion and dislocation of the self.

## CHAPTER 3. (DIS)LOCATION

### HETEROTOPIA

Michel Foucault defines heterotopias as an absolutely different space, an *other* space. Unlike utopias, described as ‘countries without place, histories without chronology [...] born, so to speak, in the heads of men’, heterotopias are real, even if they may not be exclusively physical; indeed, they can also entail a temporal element, which brings them closer to ‘heterochronias’, such as holiday time.<sup>1</sup> Foucault includes in heterotopias transitory spaces (stations, restaurants, hotels, or even corridors) and spaces, which consist of the juxtaposition of normally incompatible elements, for instance exotic gardens, as well as theatres and cinemas in which foreign spaces coexist. What these different heterotopias have in common is the fact that, while they may rely on a fictional element, they are intrinsically linked to real spaces. In this context, if theatres and cinemas, in which the spectator enters a parallel world for a determined length of time, are heterotopias, the film itself unfolding on screen is all the more so heterotopic: not only is the film strip a space in its own right but, as fictional as it may be, the world trapped in it is also real.<sup>2</sup>

### IDENTITY AND SPACE

With this as a backdrop, given that the spectator experience amounts to entering a heterotopic space, one may wonder how authors perceive their own works of self-representation. In other words, if heterotopia is an *absolutely different space*, in what way is self-representation negotiated within such ‘counter-spaces’, as Foucault puts it?<sup>3</sup> This begets two questions: firstly, does it simply amount to a process of alienation, re-

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘Heterotopias’, *AA Files*, 69 (2014), 20-22, p. 20; 21. Transcription of a radio talk for France Culture delivered on 7 December 1966.

<sup>2</sup> This is not the place to develop a discussion on the status of animation films, but one might object here that these are an exception to the rule in so far as animated images consist of drawn rather than real spaces. Firstly, the word real is used here in opposition to imaginary, such as the utopia, a space that never comes to be realised. Besides, a number of animated films, and not only documentaries, are not only referential but have been made through the pixilation of actors and settings, such as Ari Folman’s documentary *Vals im Bashir (Waltz with Bashir)*, Israel, 2007), or *A Scanner Darkly* (Richard Linklater, US, 2006). Secondly and most importantly, in terms of spectator perception, it can be argued that animated films are heterotopias because, among other reasons, the experience of watching the film takes the viewer into a parallel world, fictional or not, which, by a process of suspended disbelief, is considered real during the length of the film. The same argument would apply to science fiction.

<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘Heterotopias’, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

invention, or of putting oneself out of context, in a different *space* (that of the film strip, for instance)? Secondly, what can be said about the very space depicted in the films?

Identity is intrinsically linked to roots and location, therefore space, so that this issue becomes paramount in many self-referential works across a diversity of art forms. To give only a few examples, in his diary film *Lost, Lost, Lost* (whose title is already illustrative), Mekas defines himself as a displaced person. Similarly in literature, Doubrovsky, born in France to Jewish immigrant parents from Poland and who later moved to the United States, is obsessed with the issue of subject displacement and exile. The place is a recurrent issue in his self-fiction, which ends in the following way: ‘*nowhere is there [...] A LOCATION that is A PLACE*’ (*sic*), a clear expression of his sense of rootlessness.<sup>4</sup> In film, not only does this emphasise the characteristics of film as heterotopia but self-representational films are heterotopias par excellence, heterotopias of the self.

Unsurprisingly, locations and their counterpart, travel, take on a particular significance in the films and installations examined here. The spatial anchorage is intrinsic to Sophie Calle’s performances as she links her first heartache to a trip to Japan and India, travels across the United States in *Double Blind*, or follows a man from Paris to Venice. For Vincent Dieutre, each film, that is, the episodes of his life that he has chosen to stage, is a precise journey and each different story is linked to emblematic places, namely European cities in the case studies: his first homosexual experience is associated with Bologna; his worst period of drug addiction in the early eighties with Rome; and he anchors the stories of past relationships in different cities as he travels through Germany: Stuttgart (Georg); Nuremberg and Regensburg (Tom and later Ulrich); Dresden (Werner). As for Mariana Otero, although the locations remain implicit throughout the film, she drives the spectators to and fro between Brittany, Normandy, and Paris as she investigates into her mother’s death. As a result, the literal journeys undertaken by the protagonists offer a counterpoint to and underline their personal journeys.

## TRAVEL AND FILM

Given the recurrent links between travel and the specificity of cinema in general, this chapter aims to examine the meaning and implications of such connections in the

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<sup>4</sup> Serge Doubrovsky, *Fils*, *op. cit.*, p. 466 (my translation).

context of self-representation in particular. In the works analysed, there is a metaphoric relation between identity as a process in transit and the recurrent travels and dislocations undertaken. In other words, the cinematic balance between motion and stillness reflects the protagonists' literal and mental journeys. Of course, it could be argued that this metaphor is by no means specific to self-representation but the paradox of simultaneous stillness and movement applies particularly well to it, for identity also relies on a fundamental paradox of simultaneous permanence and change. Indeed, the identity process is the narrative of an impossible escape from the self, of a dialectic of split and unity.

#### *TRAINS, RAILWAY STATIONS, AND RAILROADS*

The relation between travel and cinema is as old as cinema itself and the railroad has played a significant role in establishing this ontological connection whose point of junction lies in the movement of the image. Lynne Kirby notes that actualities, which were predominantly travel and scenic footage, constituted the majority of films made until 1904,<sup>5</sup> not to mention the famous *Arrivée d'un Train en Gare à la Ciotat* (*The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station*, France, 1895) by the Lumière brothers. Cinema was yet another technological feat with which the nineteenth century concluded, as Kirby points when she adds that it was born in the golden age of railway travel in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

It is even suggested that the railway foreshadowed the invention of cinema: Kirby, for instance, describes the train as a 'protocinematic phenomenon'. Before her, as Annette Michelson observes, Thomas Carlyle had made the parallel between trains and the moving image as early as 1842, followed by Benjamin Gastineau in 1861, for whom the engine's linear movement 'choreograph[ed] the landscape' and provided a particular *mise en scène* of the world.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Dolf Sternberger argues that 'the railroad elaborated the new world of experience, the countries and oceans, into a panorama'.<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, Wolfgang Schivelbusch adds that the changes occurring through the rail

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<sup>5</sup> Lynne Kirby, *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Films* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1997), p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*, p. 2. Annette Michelson quoting Benjamin Gastineau, 'Track Records, Trains of Events: the Limits of Cinematic Representation' in *Junction and Journey: Trains and Films*, ed. by Laurence Kardish (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1991), pp. 24-31 (p. 25).

<sup>8</sup> Dolf Sternberger, 'Panorama of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century', trans. by Joachim Neugroschel, *October*, 4 (Fall, 1977) 3-20, p. 10.

travelling experience created the conditions for the passenger to enter a fictional world: 'the dissolution of reality and its resurrection as panorama thus became agents for the total emancipation from the traversed landscape: the traveler's gaze could then move into an imaginary surrogate landscape, that of his book.'<sup>9</sup> This new travelling experience was mainly linked to the engine's speed leading to the 'dissolution and panoramization of the outside landscape' and to the absence of communication between the travellers.<sup>10</sup> While this allows him to explain the subsequent cultural development of reading and of the 'rail novel' as a new literary genre, it also puts the emphasis on the train as a heterotopic space, whereby the traveller leaves reality to enter a heterotopia of fiction. This is just another way in which the rail experience heralds cinema.

Schivelbusch stresses a further cultural implication in terms of travelling experience: mainly because of its speed, the train revolutionised the traditional mode of travelling and therefore the perception of space, thus amounting to what he calls the 'annihilation of space and time':<sup>11</sup>

[O]n the one hand, the railroad opens up new spaces that were not easily accessible before it; on the other, it does so by destroying space, viz., the space in-between. That in-between space, or travel space, which it was possible to 'savour' while using the slow and work-intensive eotechnical form of transport, disappears on the railroads.<sup>12</sup>

Hence the journey was reduced to its points of departure and arrival, while the space in-between shrank or even disappeared. This radical transformation provides yet another element of comparison with film. In his view, it resembles the film's editing process, whereby the 'juxtaposition of images of the most disparate nature into one unit, the reality of annihilated spaces-between finds its clearest expression: the film brings things closer to the viewer as well as to each other.'<sup>13</sup>

Thus, as Kirby puts it, the train provides the 'prototypical experience of looking at a framed, moving image and as the mechanical double of the cinematic apparatus'.<sup>14</sup> Dominique Noguez playfully underlines the physical resemblance between the train and

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<sup>9</sup> Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* [1977] (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), p. 64.

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*, p. 67.

<sup>11</sup> Wolfgang Schivelbusch, 'Railroad Space & Railroad Time', in *New German Critique*, 14 (Spring, 1978), 31-40, p. 31. Lynne Kirby also takes up this idea.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*, p. 34.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*, p. 39.

<sup>14</sup> Lynne Kirby, 'Male Hysteria and Early Cinema', *Camera Obscura: A Journal of Feminism and Film Theory*, vol. 6, n. 2:17, (May, 1988), 112-132, p. 113.

the film strip, perhaps because the ‘train of multiple and similar photograms evokes the succession of wagons’ or because the ‘rail tracks, with their crosspieces, are like an iron film strip’.<sup>15</sup> As a result, travel in general and the rail experience in particular naturally became one of cinema’s subjects of predilection. Technological progress, urbanism, movement and speed, introduced by the rail, found in the filmic image an adequate medium to relay the creative energy and exaltation advocated by the futurists, as precursors of the avant-garde. The ‘broad-chested locomotives’, the ‘enormous tramways’ and ‘roaring motor-car’ already sung in the Futurist Manifesto<sup>16</sup> thus became central elements in films such as Dziga Vertov’s *Chelovek s Kino-Apparatom* (*Man with a Movie Camera*, USSR, 1924) or Walther Ruttmann’s *Berlin: die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (*Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*, Germany, 1927). And as Annette Michelson puts it, trains’ trajectory serves as ‘one axis (among others, of course) along which one may plot the history of cinema’.<sup>17</sup> Hence, cinema finds in trains an apt metaphor in terms of apparatus, temporality and movement, as well as narrative and viewing experience.

Against this backdrop, considering Vincent Dieutre’s predilection for introspection and his reflection upon the medium, the importance given to travel, and railroad journeys in particular, is not surprising. The films examined here, with the notable exception of *Mon Voyage*, in which he travels by car, all stage train journeys and railway stations. The opening scene of *Rome Désolée* shows a static shot of a railway platform while passers-by walk in front of the camera. At the same time, the voice-over narrative told by Vincent recounts an episode of his past in Rome as he was waiting at a railway station before setting on a journey with a friend (fig. 27). The film has barely started and it already evokes the protagonist’s desire to escape. In *Leçons de Ténèbres*, Dieutre uses both trains and cars and the scenes taking place in means of transport illustrate the narrative transition between the three parts of the film, the *lessons*, as he called them, and which correspond to the three cities to which he travels: Utrecht, Naples, and Rome. However, it is in *Bologna Centrale* that the railway and train constitute a central element to the film whose title directly refers to Bologna’s

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<sup>15</sup> Dominique Noguez, ‘Fantaisie ferroviaire’, *Traverses: le modèle ferroviaire*, 13 (December, 1978), 85-94, p. 86.

<sup>16</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, ‘Initial Manifesto of Futurism’ *The Italian Futurist Painters* (London The Sackville Gallery 1912), 3-8, pp. 3 & 4.

<sup>17</sup> Annette Michelson, ‘Track Records, Trains of Events’, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

railway station and its bombing.<sup>18</sup> Here too, the opening scene stages a similar setting: a panoramic tracking shot before the train's arrival at the railway station while Vincent reads off-screen the timetable and his itinerary, as a traveller who checks the legs of his journey (fig. 28). Likewise, the film closes at the railway station: the train leaves, accelerates, while the camera operates a lateral panoramic shot (fig. 29). In other words, a classic railway experience.



**Fig. 27: *Rome Désolée* (Vincent Dieutre, 1995)**



**Fig. 28**



**Fig. 29**

***Bologna Centrale* (Vincent Dieutre, 2003)**

While the train journeys may coalesce at first sight with the protagonist's episodic returns to his past, the films also draw the narrative of a present journey so that Vincent always finds himself between past and present. He not only evokes who he was then, he also endeavours to ascertain who he is now, yet, without ever really fitting in the past or in the present, so that he constantly appears to be a traveller. As a result, in-betweenness is, once again, what characterizes Vincent: the to and fro movements between one place and another, between past and present, as well as between reality and fiction show him

<sup>18</sup> The event, also known as the Bologna massacre, was perpetrated in 1980 by a group of neo-fascist terrorists (the NAR, *Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari*) who were active in the late seventies. They killed eighty-five people.

in perpetual transit, something that the train journeys emphasise particularly well. Just as for Schivelbusch, the train allows the subject to enter an imaginary world, for Mary Ann Doane, the passenger is detached from the space of perception.<sup>19</sup> And indeed, the train journeys show Vincent always slightly disconnected from his environment. Furthermore, Foucault's point about heterotopia as the juxtaposition of normally incompatible spaces is particularly useful to explain Vincent's position, or lack of it: by putting himself in a situation of perpetual transit, he neither chooses nor renounces but juxtaposes instead reconstructed memories of a past that no longer exists with present images of foreign cities, which do not correspond to the places as he remembers them.

In addition, Vincent's constant need to be *elsewhere* can also be related to Julia Kristeva's point about the abject: the subject inhabited by the abject is 'beside himself'.<sup>20</sup> In addition,

[t]he one by whom the abject exists is thus a *deject* who places (himself), *separates* (himself), situates (himself) and therefore *strays* [...].

Instead of sounding himself as to his 'being', he does so concerning his place: 'Where am I?' instead of 'Who am I?' For the space that engrosses the *deject*, the excluded, is never *one*, nor *homogeneous*, nor *totalizable*, but essentially divisible, foldable, and catastrophic.<sup>21</sup>

In other words, Dieutre constantly *displaces* or *translates* his identity quest (or reassessment) in topographic terms.

The instability of his character can also be explained through a point emphasised by Kirby. For her, most train films of the silent era 'are about gender and its relation to the machine', and generally, the 'unstable subject of the train and film is a subject of uncertain or variable sexual identity'.<sup>22</sup> However, she argues, this changes in classical narrative cinema, probably also as a result of the train gradually becoming a more secure means of transport. From then on, the train tends to be associated with national integration and male stability as opposed to the instability generally linked to femininity and otherness, including in a racial sense. In this respect, Dieutre's films tie in with the connotations ascribed to the silent period. Here, the train underlines the emotional, although not sexual, instability of his character. In fact, Vincent's gayness is perhaps the

<sup>19</sup> Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York & London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 189-190.

<sup>20</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* [1980], trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 1. The issue of abjection in Dieutre's work is examined in detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*, p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> Lynne Kirby, *Parallel Tracks*, *op. cit.*, p. 9-10.

only element which provides a certain stability and continuity, even if he often describes relationships on the verge of breaking or already broken. As such, of course, it also challenges the representation of a dominant heterosexual male stability evoked by Kirby. This is not the place to discuss the diversity of functions and metaphors associated with the train, especially considering the extent to which they have varied, even to the point of contradicting themselves according to the genres and periods. Nevertheless, the train has always been ascribed a gender metaphor, something that will be discussed further below.

### CARS AND ROADS

For Noguez, among others, the car replaced the train in cinematographic iconicity and mythology from the 1950s onwards, which is in line with Kirby's statement that the train is now ascribed a nostalgic value.<sup>23</sup> Notwithstanding Noguez's polemic nostalgia, what has been described as the road movie genre has indeed flourished after the Second World War.<sup>24</sup> More generally, as 'quest narratives', road movies seem to perpetuate the tradition of self-discovery characteristic of the *Bildungsroman*.<sup>25</sup> And Timothy Corrigan even suggests that they 'might have their precursors as far as Homer's *Odyssey*'.<sup>26</sup>

For Sophie Calle in *Double Blind*, Vincent Dieutre in *Mon Voyage d'Hiver*, and Mariana Otero in *Histoire d'un Secret*, the car plays a very significant, albeit very different, role. Of these examples, the first two could be described as road movies. However, while some aspects related to this genre will be evoked here, these films are not analysed from the specific angle of the road movie genre or category. Despite the problematic limits of its definition having rightly been addressed before, the road movie genre remains largely perceived as predominantly intrinsic to American post-war culture, especially during the 1960s, as epitomised by Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider*

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<sup>23</sup> Dominique Noguez, 'Fantaisie ferroviaire', *op. cit.*, p. 87-88; Lynne Kirby, *Parallel Tracks*, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

<sup>24</sup> For detailed and varied studies of the road movie, see among others, Timothy Corrigan, *A Cinema without Walls: Movies and Culture after Vietnam* (London: Routledge, 1991), in particular Chapter 5 (pp. 137-160); Steven Cohen & Ina Rae Hark, eds, *The Road Movie Book* (London: Routledge, 1997); Katie Mills, *The Road Story and the Rebel: Moving through Film, Fiction, and Television* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 2006); Devin Orgeron, *Road Movies: From Muybridge and Méliès to Lynch and Kiarostami* (New York & Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008). Except for the latter, these studies focus predominantly on American road movies.

<sup>25</sup> Steven Cohen & Ina Rae Hark, eds, *The Road Movie Book*, *op. cit.*, p. 3. Before them, Corrigan also mentioned the 'quest motif' shared by most films of the road movie genre, Tim Corrigan, *A Cinema without Walls*, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

<sup>26</sup> Tim Corrigan, *ibid.*

(USA, 1969).<sup>27</sup>

*Double Blind* has all the characteristics of an archetypal road movie. Made in the United States, the film shows the protagonists crossing the country westward in an old Cadillac. Yet, perhaps because Calle is a foreigner, the film comes across as a paradoxical accumulation of clichés about the American road story: from the car culture epitomised by the convertible, to the vast and infinite spaces, to the deep-rooted racism of the Southern states, or even the burgers eaten at picturesque diners on the roadside. In some respects, the film is reminiscent of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* or *Easy Rider*. The tourist's fascination for the American myth is intertwined with the irony that characterises Calle. This mixed feeling harks back to Jean Baudrillard who, in his description of America as an outsider as well, is equally 'seduced by [...] an America of speed, surfaces, and (to borrow his term) "vanishing points"', as Orgeron puts it.<sup>28</sup> Another way in which the film perverts the cliché of the road movie is that the character in control is a woman, Sophie, which goes against the general trend of the New Hollywood road movie production that followed the commercial success of *Easy Rider* and was connoted as a sexist genre focused on the 'buddy story' between male protagonists.<sup>29</sup>

With this as a backdrop, *Double Blind* is better described as a travel film diary depicting the couple's journey from New York to Los Angeles. As such, it stages a trip in which Sophie and Greg have the occasion to reflect on their relationship and its failure. As already explained, as far as Greg is concerned, it provides a space for introspection, whereas for Sophie, the journey and the film project represent the last chance to save their relationship. She even hopes to get married during their leg in Las Vegas. As a result, the car journey epitomises the ups and downs experienced by the protagonists in the relationship.

In *Death 24 x a Second*, Laura Mulvey draws a similar parallel between the car's movements and the narrative plot, and more precisely the protagonists' relationship, in Rossellini's *Viaggio in Italia (Journey to Italy, Italy, 1954)*:

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<sup>27</sup> Orgeron criticises the above cited publications because they fail to thoroughly examine the historical links of the road movie genre with earlier films and its cultural heritage from European cinema. He also finds too reductive their assumption of the road movie's 'inherent Americanness'. David Orgeron, *Road Movies, op. cit.*, p. 6. This is an issue that Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli address as they concentrate on European home movies in their book *Crossing New Europe: Postmodern Travel and the European Road Movie* (London; New York: Wallflower Press, 2006), see in particular pp. 2-5.

<sup>28</sup> Devin Orgeron, *Road Movies, op. cit.*, p. 2. Orgeron is drawing from Jean Baudrillard's *America* (trans. by Chris Turner, New York: Verso, 1988), which he discusses in detail in pages 1-5.

<sup>29</sup> Katie Mills, *The Road Story and the Rebel, op. cit.*, pp. 135-137.

The future blockages and delays to the story are prefigured as the Bentley is forced to slow its pace for some small herds of cattle. [...] After the expedition to Pompeii, the film ends with the Joyces again in the Bentley, in a drive towards an end that balances the beginning. Again, their path is halted by their surroundings [...]. This time, the halt precipitates their reconciliation and ‘the end’ on which narrative closure depends.<sup>30</sup>

The metaphoric significance of the car pervades cinema in general and provides in these examples a comparable illustration of a relationship in difficulty through the alternation between the engines’ movement and halts. In *Double Blind*, the role of the car reflects the situation of the relationship with great irony. The journey is not only regulated by the necessary halts to sleep, rest, or eat, but also by the vehicle’s frequent breakdowns, so that, from the beginning, Greg’s car becomes an additional source of tension between the couple. They even run out of petrol on the first day. This prompts Sophie to complain to herself about Greg’s failure to have the engine serviced with the money she had sent him for this purpose, which introduces money as a further problem and source of division in the couple. Sophie gets tired of paying for the repairs while Greg feels humiliated to be financially dependent on her. Provoked at first by the numerous breakdowns and the extra costs involved, Sophie’s general resentment towards Greg is gradually projected onto the car, which becomes the third protagonist in the narrative. It also embodies a journey that is not going as well as she would have hoped for. As she says on the eleventh day of the trip: ‘At least today we finally get this Cadillac Ranch thing out of the way. I’m sick of this car he keeps making excuses for.’ The humour of the situation relies on the analogy with a love triangle: the French word for car is feminine (*voiture*), which reinforces the significance of the Cadillac as the mistress – or perhaps the wife – whom Greg is struggling to leave and for whom he has to find excuses, as if stuck in-between two mutually exclusive relationships.

As Sophie complains about the car, they drive passed an old Cadillac cemetery (fig. 30), yet another hint at the American cliché.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Death 24 x a Second* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), p. 109.

<sup>31</sup> Presumably the Cadillac Ranch cemetery built in Armadilla, Texas, in 1974 by Stanley Marsh and a San Francisco art collective.



**Fig. 30: *Double Blind* (Sophie Calle & Greg Shepard, 1992)**

Although it was Greg's choice to stop at the site, once there, he no longer seems to understand his motives: 'people have these destinations until you get there, and then what? [...] I should at least get excited after all the fuss I made getting here.' The couple's respective weariness derives from different motives: Sophie feels frustrated at getting stuck and not being able to move forward, while Greg is in a state of melancholia, or depression, in contemporary terms. He feels uninvolved and constantly absent, as he admits in the film's epilogue:

I love Sophie but I write love letters to another woman. It's become a matter of which trip to tell. And then lying was the easiest compromise in order to be *somewhere else*. I never understood how someone was affected by me, *in a way I was never really there*.<sup>32</sup>

Sophie's jealousy, already aroused during the journey by Greg's recurrent calls to another woman, reaches its climax at the end of the journey, once they have settled in Los Angeles. The epilogue consists of a series of still images depicting at first their life as a happily married couple, three months after their arrival: snapshots of Sophie sitting in the car, which eventually came back from the mechanic, Greg cooking, the bed undone or Sophie's mother visiting. Each of them tells his/her respective version of the events, both in English this time, and the fairy tale soon takes a different turn. Over the still image of a black telephone on the red floor (a telephone again, as in *Douleur Exquise*), Sophie explains that she found a bundle of letters hidden the under the car seat: 'all this year we had been three'. Thus, the car is not only Greg's accomplice as the withholder of his secrets, but also a metaphor for the feminine rival, the third protagonist, the absent, yet intrusive lover between them, and even more, it is personified as a woman and becomes the rival itself, especially given the feminine gender of the word in Sophie's language. This enhances the significance of cars as a

<sup>32</sup> My emphasis.

male fetish object whose erotic and sexual iconicity Kenneth Anger plays with in *Kustom Kar Kommandos* (USA, 1965).<sup>33</sup> Greg is no exception when it comes to endearingly talking to the car, calling it *honey*, a word he also uses for Sophie, thus prompting her ironic aside: ‘this time, the “honey” is for me.’ The film is punctuated by such sarcastic remarks about Greg or the mechanics’ attitude towards the car, for instance, as he leans over the engine: ‘it looks like he’s watching his wife giving birth’.

At the same time, the car’s role is ambivalent for it also helps Sophie to fight for her cause. As she puts it, she owes her marriage with Greg to a Cadillac, which contributes to giving the project a derisive turn: the drive-in chapel; Las Vegas as the temple of playing and gambling, which is a heterotopia in itself; not to mention the drawing of a red heart superimposed on the image after they pronounce their vows (fig. 31). This undermines the idea of marriage as a serious commitment and makes it indeed more acceptable to Greg, as he confirms in the epilogue: ‘everything was a game’. To complete the playful dimension of the marriage, Sophie suggests that they spend their wedding night in the car because hotels are full: ‘we got married with her, we have to sleep with her’. Her formulation underscores once again the *ménage à trois* that they have come to form. In fact, the repetitive statement about their absence of sexual relations, ‘no sex last night’, includes the condition of the car the next day: ‘Yes. But the car said no and gave up that day.’ As a result, the success of her marriage is in the balance against the state of the Cadillac: Sophie has won, or so it seems, over her mechanic rival.



**Fig. 31: *Double Blind* (Sophie Calle & Greg Shepard, 1992)**

As mentioned above, the gender attribution to the means of transport is not new, but it is worth evoking briefly the symbolism attached to both train and car. On the one

<sup>33</sup> In Anger’s film, the clear sexual references included red seats looking like female genitals and the driver languorously stroking the car levers.

hand, the car tends to be associated with femininity; on the other, the train is generally connected to masculinity. Yet, this has not always been so for these interpretations vary greatly depending on the context and historical period. For Timothy Corrigan, for instance, ‘cars and motorcycles represent a mechanized extension of the body’, that is, of the male body, which contradicts the feminisation of the engine shown in Anger’s film.<sup>34</sup> And in 1884, Joris-Karl Huysmans compared two types of locomotives – a feminine word in French – to two types of women.<sup>35</sup> As already pointed out, Kirby explains that, in the early silent era, the train was associated with instability, regarded as a typically female trait. These earlier comparisons seem to have been widely replaced by a now overwhelmingly masculine iconicity, whereby the train’s reference as a phallic symbol has probably become a standard, as in Hitchcock’s *North by Northwest* (USA, 1959).<sup>36</sup> This connotation harks back to the qualities initially attributed to the train in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, recurrently described as a projectile because of its speed, power and weight, as Schivelbusch observes.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the metaphoric masculinity of the train is reinforced by the passengers’ status as passive subjects. Pascale Thibaudeau argues indeed that trains impose a certain degree of passivity onto the traveller who ‘submits body and soul to a superior instance, which subtracts him from the human dimension of space and time’; the car, on the contrary, allows the driver to stop, move forward, backward, slower, faster, etc., and thus epitomises the control of the situation that the protagonist would not have as a railroad traveller.<sup>38</sup>

As such, the car driver is the active subject in control of the machine, and therefore of the situation, so that the feminine connotation of the car as an object under (a potentially male) control finds here a further justification. In *Double Blind*, however, such clichéd gender attributions are undermined by the fact that Sophie is as much in control as Greg, if not more, even if he owns the car and seems to drive more frequently than her, yet she is the one with the money, as it were. In the road movie, the road only leads to freedom insofar as the protagonist has money, in line with Cohen and Rae Hark’s point about the importance of the financial issue and social divide in,

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<sup>34</sup> Timothy Corrigan, *A Cinema without Walls*, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

<sup>35</sup> Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature*, trans. by Robert Baldwick (London: Penguin, 1959), p. 37.

<sup>36</sup> The film’s final shot of a train entering a tunnel, thus cutting the scene of the couple kissing in the sleeping compartment is probably the most famous example of this sexual metaphor.

<sup>37</sup> Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>38</sup> Pascale Thibaudeau, ‘Du train et du défilement des images’, in *Cinéma et voyage*, ed. by René Gardies (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2007), pp. 95-111 (p. 103) (my translation).

respectively, *Easy Rider* and *On the Road*.<sup>39</sup> For Greg, this trip means everything but freedom and, instead, subservience to Sophie's irrepressible desire to control.<sup>40</sup> As for her, after the trip's illusory happy ending, she soon catches up with reality and faces up to the relationship's eventual failure.

In a very different genre, Vincent Dieutre also stages a road trip in *Mon Voyage*, but it is across Germany and the film is nowhere near a 'buddy movie'. As opposed to *Leçons*, whose driving and train sequences essentially serve as narrative transitions, the car journey in *Mon Voyage* seems to have a deeper significance. Here, Vincent is in charge of his godson, Itvan, whom he has promised to drive to Berlin, where the boy's mother lives. The teenager's presence enhances the adult's position as the authority figure so that Vincent seems in greater control of the situation. It ties in with Thibaudeau's remark about the driver's active position for the car journey epitomises the fact that Vincent has eventually taken his life in his own hands or reached a certain maturity. This is also reinforced by the winter season in which the journey takes place, a typically Goethian metaphor of old age.

Driving scenes are paramount as well in *Histoire d'un Secret*. However, unlike for the couple Calle/Shepard and Dieutre, in Otero's film, they constitute a figure of her investigative journey more than they embody her identity quest. Yet on a more practical level, these road sequences also provide narrative transitions between the different locations in the diegesis, just as in Dieutre's *Leçons de Ténèbres*. For instance, the director/investigator drives immediately after the opening sequence to visit her aunt and uncle. She then drives back at night, which marks the shift to a different sequence, in which she and her sister Isabel visit an emblematic place of their childhood. Mariana then visits her grandmother in a home for elderly people, after which a panoramic shot of the landscape taken from the car indicates, yet again, the transition to the following sequence. These initial car movements lay the strands of the investigation about to take place.

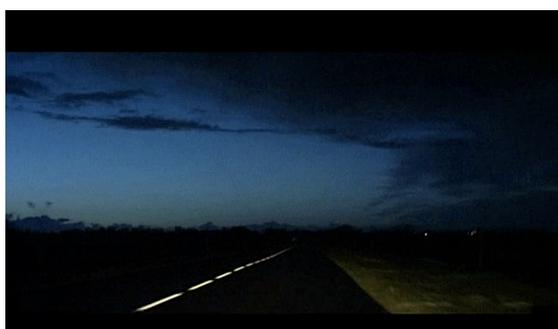
With a narrative structure built along the lines of a detective story, the cinematic journey takes Mariana from the confines of the closet, in which the secret and the paintings were kept, to the open and public space of the gallery, where the film

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<sup>39</sup> Cohen & Rae Hark, *The Road Movie Book*, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5. This applies especially to the female protagonists in *Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott, USA, 1991).

<sup>40</sup> For Cybelle McFadden Wilkens, Calle's control is slightly undermined by the fact that her image and thus artistic being is also dependent on Greg's gaze by way of his own camera. However, it does not compensate for the imbalance. Cybelle McFadden Wilkens, 'No Sex Last Night: The Look of the Other', *Intermédialités/Intermedialities: filer (Sophie Calle)*, 7 (Spring, 2006), 111-125, p. 116.

concludes. It is not a coincidence that *Histoire d'un Secret* opens with a driving sequence whose thriller atmosphere and dramatic tension are not only suggested by the gloomy weather, the wintery landscape or the silence, but by the car journey as well, as it also feeds the suspense and entertains the idea that a mystery is about to be revealed and solved. What is the purpose of this trip and what awaits the protagonist in that house? Later, a friend gives an account off screen of Clotilde's funeral while the camera films a country road at night in a forward tracking shot (fig. 32), before Mariana, back at her uncle and aunt's, reveals the real cause of Clotilde's death.



**Fig. 32: *Histoire d'un Secret* (Mariana Otero, 2003)**

This, again, is evocative of Mulvey's parallel between the car's drive and halts and the 'narrative engine', this time in relation to Hitchcock's *Psycho*.<sup>41</sup> Similarly here, the vehicle's movements and halts punctuate Mariana's investigative search for clues about Clotilde's death. Furthermore, drawing from Peter Brooks's take on the etymology of the word 'plot', which simultaneously denotes a spatial and mental reference, Mulvey connects this ambivalent meaning to the presence of a double story in the detective narrative, as Peter Wollen points out. For her, the 'space of terrain crossed by a journey is literally "plotted" by the hero's movement' and is thus associated with the 'movement forward of action' while 'the deciphering powers of the detective' are associated with 'the movement backward of detection'.<sup>42</sup> If Mulvey is specifically referring to Hitchcock's narrative structures, this dialectical relation between the mental and physical process and its simultaneous opposition between backward and forward movements also applies particularly well to *Histoire*. Indeed, Mariana's dislocations amount more to comings and goings rather than a distinct, linear journey, let alone a road narrative. The exact locations remain implicit and the spectator never knows precisely where the scene is taking place. This enhances the absence of markers (the

<sup>41</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Death 24 x a Second*, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>42</sup> *Id.*, pp. 90-91.

absence of memories) and the metaphoric dimension of Mariana's journey, which corroborates Mulvey's claim that 'the detective story necessarily brings with it a certain abstraction'.<sup>43</sup>

It is not insignificant either that the first important sequence with Mariana's father takes place in a car. She drives in silence while the camera films her from outside. This position as the driver enhances her role as the leader of the investigation. Once Antonio, who is sitting next to her, starts to talk about Clotilde, the camera cuts and focuses on him. After a while, Mariana stops the engine and starts to interact with him. A similar scene occurs near the film's end: both are sitting in the car again, following the van that is transporting Clotilde's paintings to the exhibition venue, like a funeral procession. Antonio breaks the long silence to pursue his confession, he talks about his ongoing guilt feeling, about Clotilde's last moments and reveals details he had never mentioned before. As in the previous scene, Mariana eventually stops the car but remains silent this time. These driving sequences are key moments that provide a space of intimacy and therefore also facilitate Antonio's confessions. Yet, the question is why.

The enclosed space of the car is not dissimilar to the confessional, all the more so that driver and passenger are sitting next to each other. Hence, the visual contact, which may have generated inhibitions, can be avoided as both protagonists are staring at the road and looking in the same direction. These two scenes are filmed in a shot-counter-shot mode although, strictly speaking, it would be more accurate to speak of a *shot-next-to-shot* or *shot-side-by-side-shot* (figs 33-34). The camera does not operate a 180 degree turn since the protagonists are not sitting opposite but next to each other. Instead, its point of view simply shifts laterally through a cut from driver to passenger and vice versa.



Fig. 33



Fig. 34

*Histoire d'un Secret* (Mariana Otero, 2003)

<sup>43</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Death 24 x a Second*, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

This was a conscious choice by the director who explained in an interview why she ‘put [her] father in the car’, in keeping with her need to undermine her authoritative position as the film-maker, even though she remains so, as her words betray.<sup>44</sup> It is also reminiscent of an earlier sequence in which the two sisters are sitting on a sofa, chatting about Clotilde. Otero also comments on this scene and acknowledges the lack of naturalness of such a *mise en scène*, which, she hoped, would generate unexpected and unplanned events, such as the return of old childhood memories or difficult revelations as far as Antonio is concerned. In addition, sitting side-by-side denotes a common perspective, whereas the face-to-face position would connote confrontation, let alone because the protagonists have a symmetrically opposite point of view, literally and figuratively. The situation is similar in *Double Blind*: Sophie and Greg feel more comfortable in the car because, as they are sitting next to each other, it represents perhaps the only moment during which they can avoid facing one another.

### MOVEMENT VERSUS STILLNESS

Marie-Thérèse Journot speaks of travel as an encapsulated world, apart, outside real time.<sup>45</sup> This is not only due to the confinement of the vehicle in which one travels but also to the movement itself which separates the traveller from the space s/he travels across. In *Histoire*, the car does not facilitate confession merely because it corresponds to such a confined space but also because it is a space in movement, in *translation*. Of course, Mariana stops the engine in the two car sequences precisely when the conversation becomes crucial but one may argue that what sets the confession in motion is the car’s initial movement. Most importantly, it is in the dialectical relation between movements and halts that the dynamics of these sequences lie. Lynne Kirby posits a fundamental paradox about the railroad experience, which, ‘like the film’s illusion of movement’, combines ‘simultaneous motion and stillness’.<sup>46</sup> To some extent, it also holds true of the car experience for one also sits still in the vehicle, itself in motion. This paradox is carried to a further level as the car’s movement triggers Antonio’s confession while it is the engine’s halt, which allows for the exchange between father and daughter to take place. The simultaneous motion and stillness is thus confirmed

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<sup>44</sup> Rebecca Manzoni, ‘Interview with Mariana Otero’, *op. cit.* (my emphasis).

<sup>45</sup> Marie-Thérèse Journot, ‘Le dépaysement et le cadre: Amateurs de voyages, voyages d’amateurs’, in *Cinéma et Voyage, op. cit.*, pp. 45-54, (p. 47).

<sup>46</sup> Lynne Kirby, *Parallel Tracks, op. cit.*, p. 2.

again as an intrinsic element to cinematic narration.

*Double Blind* decomposes movement, for the film's organic structure relies on the articulation between still and moving images: as opposed to the sequences filmed from the vehicle, which were stable enough, those shot outside the car were too shaky to be used. While this arose from a technical constraint, the aesthetic result aptly corresponds to the film's narrative context. After all, travel is in essence a movement regulated by stops during the journey. Needless to say, it also reflects the couple's psychological state, hence Calle and Shepard's decision to rely on that strategy: the stillness of the images outside the car, which corresponds to the stops in the journey, illustrates their discomfort and lack of communication while the moving images filmed while on the road depict a more bearable situation between them. Interestingly, they get along better in the confined, claustrophobic space of the car as opposed to the outdoor space. Although this seems paradoxical at first sight, Greg explains this apparent contradiction as such: 'I feel safe in the car, I wanna stop only when we have to. I think she agrees with me. There's something about the road we both seem to need.' The feeling of safety he describes relies most probably on the car's movement. While they are driving, their silence becomes acceptable, covered as it is by the engine's roaring sound. Drawing from Peter Kubelka's reflections on his own work, Mulvey observes that:

Across the history of cinema [...] cars, trains or other vehicles have realized the movement of the cinema machine, the projector's rhythmic 'prrrr', slightly detached from the surrounding scene and slightly attached to the mechanism of cinema.<sup>47</sup>

Is it thus the reassuring 'rhythmic "prrrr"' of the engine in motion that facilitates communication here, just as seemed to be the case for Antonio in *Histoire*? For Sophie and Greg it is perhaps rather that the car represents a safe space in which they do not overcome their lack of communication (at least at the beginning) but simply manage to tolerate it. More generally, in both examples, the confined space of the car, which combines motion and stillness and in which life follows its own rhythm, separates the protagonists from reality and from the outside world. As such, it eases the difficult confession or impossible communication and thus functions as a metonymy for film whose therapeutic function and heterotopic nature the car also embodies. The moving images echo the car's actual movement, and as Deleuze puts it:

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<sup>47</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Death 24 x a Second*, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

[T]he essence of the cinematographic movement-image lies in extracting from vehicles or moving bodies the movement which is their common substance, or extracting from movements the mobility which is their essence.<sup>48</sup>

The vehicle lends its attributes to the cinematic apparatus, hence cinema's lifelong and, to a certain extent, egocentric fascination for the vehicle in motion. While on the road, Sophie and Greg are in transit, outside their routine, outside real time, which somehow neutralises the *status quo* of their relationship. The car's forward drive typically emphasises Sophie's hope for change and, as their relationship improves, especially after their marriage, moving images gradually replace the still shots, that is, until the epilogue.

A brief technical remark is in order here. According to Kirby, the expression 'tracking shot' is drawn from the lexical field of the rail and is 'a compelling index of the permeation of filmmaking practice by the language of the railroad'.<sup>49</sup> But if we consider what has become the prevalence of the car over the train in cinema, and in addition to the differences already mentioned that are inherent to the two means of transport, it would arguably be more accurate to speak of *driving shots* to stress the distinction between the rail and road experiences and filming modes.<sup>50</sup> There are indeed ontological differences as to the greater regularity and stability of the image filmed from the train or on tracks. The landscape unfolds faster and is often more distant by train, whose trajectory is also straighter. The car journey, on the contrary, is subjected to the road's ups and downs, curves, turns, and all sorts of irregularities, as well as to unforeseen halts and slowing downs. Moreover, the sounds of either the train or the car, when integrated in the sound track (as is the case here), also play a significant role in the distinction between *driving* and *tracking* shots. Last but not least, as Thibaudeau noted, while the train tends to be associated with lateral panoramic shots, the car allows for all sorts of perspectives, lateral, forward, backward, and even rear projection.<sup>51</sup>

To come back to *Histoire*, motion and stillness also alternate as the film switches

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<sup>48</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* [1983], trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, 5<sup>th</sup> edn (London: Continuum Books, 2004), p. 23.

<sup>49</sup> Lynne Kirby, 'Male Hysteria and Early Cinema', *op. cit.*, p. 113.

<sup>50</sup> Let us not forget, however, that the fascination for the automobile in cinema did not simply succeed to that for the train, it was of course already present in early cinema. See A.L. Rees, 'Moving Spaces', in *Autopia: Cars and Culture*, ed. by Peter Wollen & Joe Kerr (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), 83-94.

<sup>51</sup> Pascale Thibaudeau, 'Du train et du défilement des images', *op. cit.*, p. 103. There are numerous exceptions, of course but these presuppose a point of view other than that of a train passenger or which would be linked in a way or another to the constraints of the plot, as in Claire Denis's *35 Rhums* (France, 2008) in which the main character drives a metropolitan train in Paris.

between scenes focusing on specific locations and panoramic shots filmed from the car: this relies on a diegetic contingency that brings Mariana to drive between different locations for the needs of her investigation. In addition, the film's flow is regularly interrupted by static camera shots and, at one point, by the insertion of still images. A panoramic *driving shot* follows the sequence in which she visits her grandmother. Then, seven black and white photographs follow one another (fig. 47, p. 128). These are all group photographs and the spectator can only presume that Clotilde appears in them. While their presence in the film tackles specific issues of memory (which are examined in the next chapter), they also echo Raymond Bellour's reflection about the pensive spectator:

The presence of a photo on the screen gives rise to a very particular trouble. Without ceasing to advance its own rhythm, the film seems to freeze, to suspend itself, inspiring in the spectator a recoil from the image that goes hand in hand with a growing fascination.<sup>52</sup>

Furthermore, the photograph 'is not truly itself'.<sup>53</sup> Here, indeed, the photographs are shown in full-screen mode and therefore stand outside the diegetic space, by contrast with a scene in which the characters would hold them in their hands. The result is a fascination for these still images, including in the Barthesian sense, because they refer to a woman who has-once-been-there. At the same time, they also represent an enigma for Mariana who cannot recognise Clotilde given her lack of memories. In this sense, they also point to the 'movement backward of detection' described by Mulvey.

The presence of Clotilde's paintings in the film has a comparable effect in terms of suspending movement. Mariana shows them to an art conservationist: as the latter follows the brush movements on the canvases with her finger, the camera lingers on them in extreme close-ups, thus not only providing moments of pause and contemplation between the moments of investigation, but also enhancing this movement of detection. In an even more striking way in Dieutre's *Leçons de Ténèbres*, the camera also tends to pause on the different paintings. Interestingly, these pauses in *Leçons* or the various static takes in his other works become especially noticeable if the film is played in fast forward or backward mode, which gives them an almost subliminal

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<sup>52</sup> Raymond Bellour, 'The pensive spectator' [1984], trans. by Lynne Kirby, in *The Cinematic: Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. by David Campany (London: Whitechapel; Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007), pp. 119-123 (p. 119).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

dimension.<sup>54</sup> As Bellour puts it, ‘their relative stillness tempers the “hysteria” of the film’ and, rather than providing clues about the character or the narrative, these moments of delay essentially open up a ‘slight swerve in the film’s course [in which] the viewer is also able to reflect on cinema’.<sup>55</sup> However, while the photograph in the film enables the spectator’s reflection upon cinema, the paintings in *Leçons* and in *Histoire* take this reflection to a further level and point to the notion of intermediality, as we shall see in Chapter 6.

### SPACES OF TRANSITION

In addition to locations, considered here in terms of public versus domestic, as well as open versus closed spaces, some can be described as transitory spaces, such as the means of transport already described, railway stations, restaurants or hotel rooms. The point of these distinctions is to look at the implication of such categories in the narratives examined here. As a travel diary film, *Double Blind* is necessarily constructed around transitory spaces within which closed and confined environments are predominant: the car of course, hotel rooms, diners, garages, etc. By contrast, the landscape filmed from inside the car appears as an open space to which Greg and Sophie do not belong, thus confirming once more Marie-Thérèse Journot’s comparison of travel with a world apart. As they travel, they are constantly together and isolated from the outside world, with only three exceptions, when they enter other people’s domestic spheres. For instance, they visit Susan Rothenberg and Bruce Nauman in New Mexico, and two days later, they stay with Greg’s sister and her children, where the tension between the couple reaches a point of crisis. Except for these moments, they only make brief encounters: the numerous mechanics who fix the car, the staff or other customers met in diners and bars, and so forth. Paradoxically Greg, who says he feels safer in the confined space of the car, also suffers from this social isolation and describes the reunion with their friends as ‘a beautiful evening, the first escape we had from each other’. Sophie, on the contrary resents the intrusion of strangers into her intimate space. At one point, she blames Greg for having taken a hitchhiker: ‘this car has become my house. Why did he let this guy in? It’s as if he were in my bedroom.’ This comment is all the more ironic that for her first artistic performance (*Les*

<sup>54</sup> Thus confirming what partakes for Mulvey of new ‘ways of consuming cinema’, see *Death 24 x a Second*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>55</sup> Raymond Bellour, ‘The pensive spectator’, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

*Dormeurs/The Sleepers*, 1979), she did invite strangers to come and sleep in her bed. Maybe the only difference lies in the fact that here, this was Greg's idea. This contrast in their attitude reflects their own position in the relationship: Greg feels uncomfortable around Sophie and tries to escape from the confinement of the relationship by introducing people into their 'encapsulated world'.

Overall, Calle tends to have a predilection for transitory spaces, especially the hotel room, if one thinks of her performance *L'Hôtel* (1981), as well as the central role it plays in *Douleur Exquise* (2003).<sup>56</sup> In the latter case, it is indeed central in a spatial and figurative sense: figurative because the hotel room in Delhi embodies the moment of pain, and spatial because it constitutes the space of transition between the first (*Before the pain*) and the last (*After the pain*) section. The functional significance of passage thus arises in two ways here: as a hotel room, transitory *per se*, and as an intermediate space between the larger two sections of the installation. More generally, this harks back to the function of the gallery as a space of transition and to the condition of the exhibition as ephemeral. In this respect, one of Calle's exhibitions is particularly emblematic.

Her installation *Rachel, Monique*, held in 2010, was especially conceived for the area under construction of a gallery's extension, so that the exhibition took place in a building site.<sup>57</sup> The work is a tribute to Calle's mother, Rachel, who died of breast cancer in 2006, and is best described as a multimedia installation that combined photographs, objects, and several videos, among which one of Rachel as she lay on her deathbed.<sup>58</sup> The exhibition space was thus transformed into a temporary crypt in memory of the latter, all the more so that the area was underground. At the bottom of the staircase, the visitors were welcomed by a row of ten framed full-scale black and white photographs. Laid on the floor, they represented gravestones bearing the inscription 'mother' in different languages (fig. 35). At the end of the row, another full-scale photograph hung on the wall, representing this time an open coffin in which lay Rachel (fig. 36). The transitory dimension of the exhibition is thus enhanced by the very nature of the exhibition space as a site under construction. Moreover, as a symbolic funeral, this work also points to the transience of life.

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<sup>56</sup> See descriptions, respectively pp. 269 & 262.

<sup>57</sup> Palais de Tokyo, Paris (20 October-27 November 2010), see description p. 266.

<sup>58</sup> *Pas Pu Saisir la Mort (Couldn't Catch Death)*, 2007. Calle had already presented this video at the Venice Biennale in 2007 where she represented France.



Fig. 35



Fig. 36

***Rachel, Monique* (Sophie Calle, 2010), installation view**

Transitory spaces also predominate in Dieutre's films for all of them stage travels and errands through foreign cities. In all of them, the camera wanders along empty, shabby streets, car parks, corridors, dark hotel rooms, or buildings. *Rome Désolée* is perhaps the most acute illustration of such transitory spaces and reinforces the characterisation of Vincent as a man in perpetual transit and unsettled, especially as he remains absent from the image. As already mention, both *Rome* and *Bologna* open on a railway station, a transitory space par excellence, while some sequences also take place in a taxi in *Bologna* and in *Leçons* (in addition to the scenes in which Vincent drives a car in the latter case). *Leçons* also features sequences in restaurants, gay bars, museums, and what looks like a film studio in which he recorded the *chiaroscuro* scenes. To come back to heterotopias, for Michel Foucault, these are *counter-spaces*, that is, absolutely different spaces or 'localised utopias', such as the fictional world that children invent when they play.<sup>59</sup> To some extent, this aptly describes the *chiaroscuro* scenes as well as the extra-diegetic musical scenes in *Mon Voyage d'Hiver*. They act like fictional incursions into the narrative, like dreams or fantasies, which stand for extra-diegetic pauses, and also contribute to building Dieutre's filmic self-fictional space as a heterotopia in itself.

Contrary to Calle and Shepard's *Double Blind*, the alternation between closed and open spaces does not seem to have a significant impact on the narrative here. Whether Dieutre is filming streets, hotel rooms or people's homes, what shows through is a recurrent sense that the character does not belong to his surroundings. Instead, the notable predominance of public as opposed to private or domestic spaces contrasts with

<sup>59</sup> Michel Foucault, *Heterotopias*, *op cit.*, p. 20.

Sophie Calle's approach or with many other self-referential films, which start in the domestic sphere, as discussed in Chapter 1. Here, the spectator never sees Vincent's own domestic sphere, since Vincent does not belong anywhere, he is nomadic and marginal, stuck in an interstitial space.<sup>60</sup> As Martine Beugnet puts it:

The strategy of dis-location (*dé-placement*), where the characters thus literally find themselves on the road, 'outside' (by contrast with the domestic circle), or metaphorically, on the side of those excluded from society, is crucial in cinema because the characteristics of the medium, its links with the perception and representation of geographic and temporal space make it a privileged medium of disorientation and 'defamiliarisation'.<sup>61</sup>

Dieutre's filmic space is indeed that of estrangement and alienation. However, if one compares the four films examined here, there seems to be an evolution and gradual increase of domestic spaces, although not necessarily his own: in *Leçons*, what the dark room in which he shoots the Caravaggiesque sequences could very well be his own home. At one point, he has a conversation with art historian Leo Bersani in what looks like someone's living room, even if the viewer is left unsure as to whose home this is. And in *Mon Voyage d'Hiver*, Vincent and Itvan stay with some of Vincent's friends (in Tübingen and Dresden) before finally arriving in Berlin at the flat of Itvan's mother, as if Vincent were gradually looking for his way home.

By contrast, in *Histoire d'un secret*, Otero alternates scenes of roads, panoramic shots of the landscape with spaces that necessarily mean something to her and her relatives: the different houses of her childhood, the flat in which the family lived before Cotilde's death, her father's as well as her aunt and uncle's home. The predominance of domestic spaces tallies with the fact that family is the point of departure of Mariana's investigation into the past. In addition, because the exact locations remain imprecise, the private sphere is emphasised to the detriment of public geographic landmarks. As the secret is gradually disclosed, however, the environment shifts little by little from domestic to public spaces. Following the relatives' interventions within the domestic sphere, Mariana's investigation takes her, to put it concisely: from an archive where she looks at press material about abortion (fig. 37); to the home of her mother's

<sup>60</sup> However, he also made two films named after Parisian metro stations: *Bonne Nouvelle* (France, 2001) focuses on his neighbourhood in Paris, while *Jaurès* (France, 2012) is the name of an area in which a former partner lives (Dieutre intertwines his personal story with the situation of Afghan refugees living on the street nearby). This said, metro stations, as typical heterotopic spaces, are everything but domestic spaces.

<sup>61</sup> Martine Beugnet, *Marginalité, sexualité, contrôle dans le cinéma français contemporain* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 2000), pp. 48-49 (my translation).

gynaecologist (fig. 15, p. 67); to the office of Joëlle Brunerie-Kauffmann<sup>62</sup> (fig. 38); and later, to a hospital bedroom (fig. 81, p. 172), before eventually closing on Clotilde's retrospective in the museum, a public space par excellence (fig. 39). This final sequence not only aims at giving Clotilde public recognition as a painter, but also at marking the end of the secret. At the same time, this evolution draws a clear trajectory of Clotilde's story from the domestic and personal sphere into the public and political one.



Fig. 37



Fig. 38



Fig. 39

***Histoire d'un Secret* (Mariana Otero, 2003)**

Furthermore, the domestic spaces in the film belong to her relatives but not to Mariana. As the investigator, she visits these people but does not inhabit the space. Instead, she inhabits the film, which, as a medium, becomes by extension that missing domestic space or rather, becomes a political space, which she creates as a compensation for her absent memories of her childhood. Otero's approach is in this sense at the opposite end of Dieutre's. While he recurrently states his lack of attachment to his surroundings, Otero's transitory space is limited to the car, which embodies narrative transitions and Antonio's confessional booth. Unlike Dieutre, she is trying to anchor Clotilde's story in physical space in order to compensate for the general denial about her death and her absence of memories. This endeavour is also a way to

<sup>62</sup> Joëlle Brunerie-Kauffmann is a relatively well-known personality in France: a gynaecologist, she was very active in the feminists' campaign to legalise abortion in the late 1960s and 1970s.

counteract what almost became a non-existence: Clotilde is barely remembered by her daughters, even mentioning her name had implicitly become a taboo. At one point, Mariana places an easel with one of Clotilde's landscape paintings in the middle of a meadow, perhaps as a way of asserting that 'Clotilde was here' (fig. 40).



**Fig. 40: *Histoire d'un Secret* (Mariana Otero, 2003)**

This need for spatial anchorage is also present in Calle's installation called *North Pole* (2009), which was part of the exhibition entitled *Rachel, Monique*. This piece retraces a trip to the North Pole. In the introduction, we learn that Rachel dreamt of travelling to the North Pole but never did. As a result, when Calle was offered the opportunity to join an expedition to the Arctic in 2008, she accepted in memory of her mother, 'to take her there'.<sup>63</sup> The artist takes with her three objects that belonged to Rachel to bury in the snow on the Northern Glacier (fig. 41).



**Fig. 41: *North Pole* (Sophie Calle, 2009)**



**Fig. 42: *Rachel, Monique* (Sophie Calle, 2010), installation view**

In addition, in the exhibition space of the Palais de Tokyo, she handwrote inscriptions on the wall with a felt-tip marker, such as the indications as to the exact location of Rachel's grave in the cemetery of Montparnasse (fig. 42). By leaving objects behind or

<sup>63</sup> Sophie Calle, 'The first time I used in a text the words "climate change"', blog, <<http://www.capecfarewell.com/diskobay/using-the-words-climate-change/>> [accessed 2 April 2015].

tagging the walls in this way, Calle, like Otero, gives her mother topographic and material anchorage by affirming that *Mum was here*, akin to a teenager's street tag.

### SELF-REPRESENTATION, HETEROTOPIA OF THE SELF

The idea of (dis)location points to the simultaneous motion and stillness that characterises the trains and cars featured in the works discussed, film and, ultimately, cinema itself. What is inscribed in this dialectical relation is also the process of exteriorising and materialising self-representation, that is, an identity quest, which relies on permanence and transition.

The dislocation also takes place through metaphor to create different levels of signification. For Otero and Dieutre, the journey is simultaneously temporal and geographic. While roaming across different countries, cities or places, they travel back in time, to the places, respectively, of her childhood and of his tumultuous youth. Calle drives forward, draws her own path, and even hides clues for future generations:

[...] I wonder [...] if the climate changes will carry [Rachel] to the sea [...] or if she will stay on the beach as a marker in time where the glacier was in the Holocene period.

And maybe in thousands of years, specialists in glaciology will find her ring and discuss endlessly this flash of diamond in Inuit culture.<sup>64</sup>

Yet, in all three cases, 'the journey is mostly mental'<sup>65</sup> and the artists create a space through film, which amounts to a heterotopia of the self, in which they *re-member*, reinvent or simply reassess themselves. Otero is looking for anchorage points and the film provides a space in which she symbolically marks the territory with traces of her mother. So does Calle, albeit literally, as she leaves Rachel's belongings in the North Pole. At the same time for Otero, the quest concerns her mother's identity rather than her own. Because *Histoire* also becomes an investigative journey, the quest for the lost mother ultimately brings Mariana back to what has driven her and constitutes the essence of her work as a documentary-maker: her interest in social issues. For Calle, space is envisaged as a map comparable to a game board on which she throws the dice to place her pawns, in order to create fictions of her self. She also tests her own limits, just like Dieutre, although his train journeys imply a certain self-abandon. Train stations

<sup>64</sup> Sophie Calle, 'The first time I used in a text the words "climate change"', *op. cit.*

<sup>65</sup> Marie-Thérèse Journot, 'Le dépaysement et le cadre: Amateurs de voyages, voyages d'amateurs', *op. cit.*, p. 50.

and urban areas pervade *Rome*, *Bologna*, and *Leçons*. Considering his borderline trajectory, a comment by Pascale Thibaudeau comes to mind (although made in a different context): ‘man cannot confront with the power of the train unless in the quest for his own destruction.’<sup>66</sup> By contrast, the car journey to Berlin presents him as steadier and more in control of the situation. Yet, generally, more than an escape, the journeys stage a return to the places in which he reinvents himself while confronting his past, that is, his near self-destruction.

(Dis)location ultimately points to an impossible quest – in resonance with the crisis that defines self-representation –, stuck between the desire to find spatial anchorage and to weigh anchor. When Foucault describes the ship as the heterotopia par excellence,<sup>67</sup> one can only wonder if he had Böcklin’s painting series of the *Isle of the Dead* (1880-1886) in mind (fig. 43), or more generally the barge in which Charon would take the mortals to the kingdom of Hades.



**Fig. 43: Arnold Böcklin, *Die Toteninsel* (*The Isle of the Dead*, 1880, Kunstmuseum Basel)**

Intriguingly, it is in a boat that Calle travels to the North Pole for Rachel’s last journey and, even uncannier are, as Antonio reveals, Clotilde’s last words before she died: ‘And this boat, where is it heading?’

<sup>66</sup> Pascale Thibaudeau, ‘Du train et du défilement des images’, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

<sup>67</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘Heterotopias’, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

## CHAPTER 4. TOPOGRAPHIES OF THE PAST

### SPATIALISING THE PAST

While the previous chapter briefly touches on transitory spaces, time, as one among them, requires greater attention. The lexical field of space permeates discourses on time whose physical representation probably goes as far back as time itself and has been a recurrent metaphor to compensate for its abstraction and ephemerality. As a matter of fact, this representation has tended to be linear, hence the recurrent comparison with the road or the river. However, given the breadth of the topic, the focus will be narrowed down to the specific ways in which the artists under scrutiny here deal with the past and its related issues.

It is arguably the historian Pierre Nora who crystallised the connection between space and memory with his seminal work on *lieux de mémoire* (*sites of memory*), which may consist of commemorative stones or places as much as celebrations or dates.<sup>1</sup> The *spatialisation* of the past should thus be understood in broad terms for it equally designates physical anchorage, acts, and rituals, among other things. Our need to ‘create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies and notarize bills’ answers the fact that there is no memory left: ‘[i]f we were able to live within memory, we would not have needed to consecrate *lieux de mémoire* in its name’.<sup>2</sup> It is the memory loss that prompts the desire to fill the void thus left. Similarly, insofar as the past, of which memory is a form of processing, is necessarily defined in relation to present and future and thus refers to that which no longer is, it tends to be associated with negativity, loss, or crisis. Nora explains this memory loss through the tremendous acceleration of history that has characterised the last century. In the same vein, Andreas Huyssen also invokes the acceleration of time to explain the fetishistic attitude that has given rise to a paradoxical phenomenon of simultaneous memory fever and amnesia: ‘The current obsession with memory’, he says, ‘is not simply a function of the *fin de siècle* syndrome, another symptom of postmodern pastiche. Instead, it is a sign of the crisis of that culture of temporality that marked the age of modernity with its celebration

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Nora, ‘Between Memory and History: *Les lieux de Mémoire*’, *Representations*, 26 (Spring, 1989), 7-25.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*, pp. 12; 8.

of the new as utopian, as radically and irreducibly other.’<sup>3</sup>

While memory and, more broadly, the treatment of the past are associated with space through metaphor, it is by virtue of its etymology that the concept of archive is rooted in space. However the word *archive* is polysemous. For Jacques Derrida, if the Greek root it stems from (*arkhê*) originally meant *beginning* and *commandment*, *archive* derives more directly from the Latin *archivum*, (itself based on the Greek *arkheion*), the house in which the ruling magistrates used to live.<sup>4</sup> The archive is thus simultaneously related to law (the nomological principle); the space in which the documents are kept, maintained, and studied, as well as the documents themselves, as a site of collection for memory. From the outset of his book, Derrida also states another ambivalence of the archive, which implies for him the memory as much the forgetting of its own name. As a result, the archive, too, irremediably brings back the irresolvable tension between memory and amnesia. Furthermore, it also hints at evil, suffering, illness, nostalgia, while embodying ‘the absolute impatience of a desire for memory’.<sup>5</sup> Memory and the archive are by no means synonyms and indeed, Derrida warns against the confusion often made between the latter and what he calls the ‘experience of memory’, which eventually comes down to ‘a search of lost time’.<sup>6</sup> In any case, they are intrinsically related as ways of interpreting, de- and reconstructing the past.

In brief, the topography of the past always retraces the story of loss, be it that of childhood, youth, love, even historical monuments, and, as far as Otero is concerned, of memory itself. Hence the attention given to the search for traces and investigation. However, while the spatialisation of the past is omnipresent here, the ideas discussed are also bound together by the underlying understanding of the past as void, as absence. Thus, the past will not be treated exclusively in terms of space or topographic markers even if these are recurrent elements. Naturally, the distinction between individual and collective or social memory is not relevant in relation to Otero’s documentary only: although the three artists examined here all deal with so-called personal issues, their works largely exceed the sole question of their individual past or memories. As a result, this chapter covers a wide range of topics, sometimes in a very eclectic and distinct

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<sup>3</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York; London: Routledge, 1995), p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. by Eric Prenovitz (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), pp. 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Prière d’insérer’ [only present in the French edition], *Mal d’Archive: une Impression Freudienne* (Paris: Galilée, 1995), pp. 1-3 (pp. 1; 3) (my translation).

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*, pp. 1-2.

manner, sometimes in ways that intersect, despite the differences within the corpus.

Of the three artists, Sophie Calle is the exception with respect to personal memory. Because her approach lies within performance and thus *mise en scène* of the self, it is deeply rooted in the present (that of the performance and its aftermath). Of course, her life is sporadically evoked but her specificity is precisely that she writes her life as she goes along, as it were. As a result, the *treatment of the past* in and for itself does not seem paramount for her, unless it has a more explicit and direct connection to issues of lack or absence. When taken individually, some of her works that will be examined in this chapter slightly move away from the thematic of self-representation even though, as performances, they integrate a corpus constitutive of her artistic persona. By contrast, what is at stake for Otero is her personal past but the investigation into Clotilde's fatal abortion allows her to replace her intimate story within a wider social and historical context. This eventually raises theoretical issues about the relation between individual and collective memory. Stuck in the 'dialectic of remembering and forgetting',<sup>7</sup> her film also results in the statement of absence. Otero's quest takes her along a fairly linear temporal, yet simultaneously backwards and forwards, trajectory from a present perspective, as in a detective story, whereas Dieutre's travels into time rely on a different temporal structure. His nomadic wanderings do not only show him in perpetual transit between different places but also, of course, between past, present, and even future, without really adhering to one or the other.

### THE ROAD AGAIN: LOOKING BACKWARDS

For Dieutre, dislocation is inseparable from temporality. The paths along which Vincent finds himself always take him back to his past as a result of his introspective gaze. Consequently, *that-which-no-longer-is* always seems to coincide with an *elsewhere*: Vincent returns to Rome and Bologna to tell of his life there back in the eighties; similarly, while it is not clear to the spectator if he also lived in Germany, his trip across the country in *Mon Voyage*, as well as to Utrecht and Italy again in *Leçons*, are a pretext for him to evoke and reassess his past relationships, which are linked to those places in one way or another.

In an article on Abbas Kiarostami's *Ta'm e Guilass* (*Taste of Cherry*, Iran, 1997), Laura Mulvey stresses the temporal connotation of the road, which she compares to

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<sup>7</sup> Derrida, 'Prière d'insérer', *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.

cinema: the first is a trace of human movement across the countryside, and cinema, despite its potential for illusion and deception, ‘has a similar relationship to the traces of the past’.<sup>8</sup> Similarly here, the road and cinema converge as both point towards the past: Vincent’s former relationships and, in *Mon Voyage* in particular, Germany’s history. Moreover, Mulvey points to the recurrent connection between the season and the journey as she discusses the importance of autumn in Kiarostami’s film, which allowed him to ‘take advantage of the metaphorical significance of the season of dying’.<sup>9</sup> If Kiarostami has chosen autumn to signify death, Dieutre’s winter journey through a white snowy landscape and whose title is borrowed from Schubert’s melancholic *lieder*, entails several connotations of aging and death. The season is perhaps the most visible and poetic manifestation of the impermanence of time, and ultimately of life, in the same way as the road is a quintessential transitory space, that is, a ‘space of personal transformation’ and, more precisely, ‘a transition [...] to a new level of understanding’.<sup>10</sup> From *Rome* to *Leçons*, Vincent’s journeys seem indeed to have taken him to a new level of understanding: if the former retraces his past in the eighties, the latter opens with a comment, off screen, about his state in the nineties. In *Bologna*, Vincent returns again to his youth in the eighties but this time, his inscription in the present is more palpable. As for *Mon Voyage*, because it deals with aging and death, it could almost be seen as a narrative of the future. Thus, as a *Gesamtwerk*, Dieutre’s self-representational project functions as a memory work.

Likewise, Otero’s *Histoire* simultaneously stages a literal movement back to the places of her childhood and a metaphoric return to the past in which the origin of the secret lies. Although the film is very different from Dieutre’s, Mariana’s journey is in this sense very similar to his: the road provides a comparable metaphor and even combines more directly Mulvey’s comparison between cinema and the road. Here too, ‘the road along which [Mariana] travels from one point to the other marks both [her] journey and the linear movement of the plot itself.’<sup>11</sup> The places that she revisits, the region and houses in which the family lived before Clotilde died, represent lost spaces on a temporal level: as childhood gone, of course, and as missing memories of this very childhood. By capturing these places on screen, the film appears as an attempt to recreate that missing space. In a sequence described earlier, Mariana and her sister are

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<sup>8</sup> Laura Mulvey, ‘Kiarostami’s Uncertainty Principle’, *Sight and Sound*, 8:6 (June, 1998), 24-27, p. 27.

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*, p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*, p. 27.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

walking in the garden of a house in which they spent time in their childhood. This location is very significant for Isabel because it is where she understood that Clotilde had died (fig. 44). She thus describes that moment precisely and reminisces about the time spent there, the games they used to play, while Mariana listens, silent and thoughtful. After a while, the latter finally speaks, only to admit that she cannot remember anything.



Fig. 44: *Histoire d'un Secret* (Mariana Otero, 2003)

This scene reveals how Mariana hoped that going back to this place might have triggered the return of her memory. In this sense, the film contains those lost spaces at the same time as it expresses their absence and embodies as such a *site of memory*, to paraphrase Nora and to transpose his concept from collective to individual memory. Thus, Mariana also needs the film to remind herself that she has forgotten. Drawing from Henri Bergson, Gilles Deleuze argues that memory can be assimilated to a space, be it topographic or temporal, in which we move: ‘memory is not in us; it is we who move in a Being-memory, a world-memory’.<sup>12</sup> By revisiting these spaces with her relatives, she visits their world-memory whilst unable to penetrate it because, to a certain extent, she has lost some of that space, a part of the world-memory, when she lost her mother, so that the film is an attempt to reconstitute that missing world-memory.

## BREAKING LINEAR TEMPORALITY

Still according to Deleuze, ‘the past does not follow the present that it is no longer, it coexists with the present it was. The present is the actual image, and *its*

<sup>12</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson & Robert Galeta, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (London: Continuum Books, [1985] 2005), p. 95.

contemporaneous past is the virtual image, the image in a mirror.<sup>13</sup> Resorting to a diversity of narrative and aesthetic strategies, Dieutre provides an enlightening illustration of Deleuze's conception of time and memory. His films are comparable to a world-memory in which past and present do not simply alternate, as flashbacks do, but coexist instead. While doing so, Dieutre breaks and thus challenges the traditionally linear representation of time, which also harks back to the discussion on the temporal constructions at work in self-representation, as examined in Chapter 1. As James Olney suggests, 'the autobiographic process is not after the fact but a part and a manifestation of the living, and not only a part but, in its symbolic recall and completeness, the whole of the living.'<sup>14</sup> This is not only in keeping with the earlier suggestion about Calle's construction of her persona within and throughout her artistic performance. It also applies to Dieutre's self-representational project of reinvention and reassessment: he thus *re-actualises* his past. In this sense, the loose onscreen re-enactment of his past relationships in *Mon Voyage* and in *Leçons*, as a counterpoint to the voice-over narratives, is only the most visible (but not the unique) manifestation of the meshing of past and present.

The soundtrack also contributes to setting different temporal levels. In *Mon Voyage*, for example, Dieutre mixes a series of diegetic sounds during the film's credits (the weather forecast on the German radio; the protagonists entering the car and rubbing their hands; the wind; birds; etc.), that gradually dissolve to give place to Vincent's off-screen prologue. By a similar process of cross-dissolve transition, we also hear, amidst the growing sound of the wind blowing and the birds' croaks, the fine-tuning of a piano while, as if coming from an echoing temporal background, as it were, a male voice emerges in crescendo reciting Paul Celan's emblematic poem about the horrors of World War II, and whose title, *Todesfuge* (*Death Fugue*, 1948), also bears a musical connotation. A few seconds later, the musicians start to play Schubert.<sup>15</sup> As a result, this prelude brings together, or rather superimposes in a counterpoint the present of Vincent and Itvan's journey, the period of the Second World War through Celan's poem, and German romanticism with Schubert.

Moreover, as shown in Chapter 2, the voice over creates a distance by splitting body and voice. Therefore, it points to a temporal space that exceeds the present of the

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<sup>13</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Time Image*, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>14</sup> James Olney, *Metaphors of Self: the Meaning of Autobiography*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 40.

<sup>15</sup> *Aus dem Fluß*, Lied n. 7, *Winterreise*, *op.* 89 D911.

cinematic frame. At the same time, in *Rome*, and to a lesser extent in *Leçons*, the fact that the stories of the past are told in the present tense only enhances the co-existence of different temporalities. In addition to the voice, Dieutre uses peripheral sounds, which bring the spectator back in the diegetic present of the image. In *Bologna* for instance, the disembodied voice is telling yet another story from the past, while a *driving* shot, filmed from a taxi, reveals images of the streets. The voice over then stops and is relayed by the acousmatic voices of the taxi's CB radio and the 'purring' of the car's engine. By achieving concordance with the image, these diegetic sounds bring Vincent and the spectator back into the visual frame, and therefore in the consciousness of the present. This way of using the sound (including the voice over) generates a more fragmented and diffuse temporality and reflects Vincent's simultaneous self-representation in the past and in the present.

In comparison with Otero, Dieutre experiments much more with the cinematic device to build this temporal structure, which is ingrained in the films' aesthetics. The comparison with Calle is more difficult in this respect since her body of work is largely photographic and based on performance, especially with regard to the works examined here. Dieutre develops a strategy of counterpoint, which finds a prime application in *Mon Voyage*, as shown above. Indeed, the different narrative instances introduce a vertical (paradigmatic) dimension and are organised on different levels, akin to Schubert's musical score, the leitmotiv to the film. In fact, the music provides one such counterpoint level because it is interpreted in the recording studio outside the diegesis, therefore outside narrative temporality, almost like an eternal present or perhaps outside time, just like Vincent's character, in a way. This verticality also undermines the horizontality based on the geographical movement of the journey usually associated with a linear representation of temporality. Besides, the tense of the musical sequences also points to that of the film-making process (that is, the image as a given present, at the level of *monstration*, as Gaudreault points out, see Chapter 1, p. 45-46). Likewise, the Caravaggiesque scenes of *Leçons* in the studio also hint at an extra-diegetic temporality; in this case, however, it does not rely on aural but on visual aspects.

Beyond the implications in terms of point of view and levels of subjectivity already expounded, the resort to different formats and types of camera also raises questions of temporality in *Mon Voyage*. The film can be read as a testament to Itvan and, in a more optimistic reading, is also an act of transmission from the adult to the boy. To a limited extent, there is a certain parallel between this transmission from the

old to the young, on the one hand, and the transition from analogue to digital formats, on the other, even if this comparison does not reflect any correspondence in terms of point of view and is not aimed at associating in a strict way Itvan with digital technologies, and the *older* Vincent with traditional celluloid film. More simply, perhaps, as we watch Itvan using his camcorder throughout the film, we cannot but think that what is at stake is the transmission of cinema. In this sense, *Mon Voyage* points to central reflections about the practice of film-making, namely here, the shift in technologies and more generally the evolution of cinema itself, all the more so that, so we are told, Itvan wants to become a film-maker.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, just as Dieutre weaves together past and present, what is suggested here is perhaps less an opposition than a dialectical relation between the different technologies, especially as he makes narrative and aesthetic sense of their concomitant use. Indeed, the contrast between linear (the film strip and the journey) and non-linear (digital technology, the coincidence of past and present) structures leads to a different kind of interaction that also has creative implications, as demonstrated in Chapter 2.

#### **INVESTIGATION: RECONSTITUTING PRE-HISTORY**

While the topographic dimension of investigation has been developed in the previous chapter, the focus will shift here onto its temporal implications, even if they are obviously closely intertwined. As Mulvey puts it, the ‘story of investigation looks backwards, searching for and deciphering clues in order to reconstruct events that have already taken place’, it looks ‘into time’.<sup>17</sup> In other words, the physical movement backwards and the gaze into the past are intrinsic to one another. Peter Wollen makes a connection between investigation and temporality by referring to Ernst Bloch who points to the necessary existence of a primeval world (*Urwelt*) in the crime novel:<sup>18</sup>

Before [the] first word of [the] first chapter something has happened, but no one knows what, apparently not even the narrator. A dim focal point exists,

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<sup>16</sup> Vincent Dieutre, ‘Entretien de Vincent Dieutre avec François Bonenfant autour de *Mon Voyage d’Hiver*’, *op. cit.*

<sup>17</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Death 24 x a Second*, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

<sup>18</sup> Peter Wollen, ‘Vectors of Melancholy’, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34.

as yet unrecognised, whither and thither the entire truckload of ensuing events is mobilized – a crime, usually murder, precedes the beginning.<sup>19</sup>

It is precisely the *pre-historical* event that prompts the detective search into the past in the backwards movement of detection described by Mulvey. Butor's idea of the crime novel as a double story converges with Bloch's point of course. However, Butor highlights the (topo)graphic representation of this duality, apparently present *within* the novel, whereas Bloch stresses its temporal dimension and the fact that the story, in effect, begins *outside* the novel, that is, *before* the story. Although the retrospective dimension in Butor's novel is unequivocal, and despite the limits and artificiality of distinguishing topographic from temporal markers, the relevance of Bloch's point is the parallel it provides with the cinematic off-screen – *exteriority*, as it were – which is as much spatial as temporal.

Sophie Calle provides a good example of this kind of temporal structure as she resorts to an investigative approach in several of her performances/installations, in particular, *Une Jeune Femme Disparaît*, (*A Young Woman Vanishes*, 2003), *Ghosts* (1989-1991), and *Last Seen* (1991).<sup>20</sup> The first is a piece made specifically for the retrospective held at the Centre Pompidou in 2003. However, the story really began three years earlier: in Paris, in February 2000, a 28 year-old woman named Bénédicte Vincens disappeared in the night after running away from her flat on fire. She was allegedly never to be seen again. According to the press, she was interested in Sophie Calle's work and some journalists went as far as to suspect a hoax organised by the artist.<sup>21</sup> The intriguing detail is that the woman worked as an attendant at the Centre Pompidou and used to show great curiosity for the visitors' demeanour. This series of coincidences expectedly sparked Calle's interest, and prompted her to create a work in her name (figs 45-46). Bénédicte Vincens's flat is the crime scene par excellence: a mysterious fire, a vanished lady and burnt remains. The words on the postcard sent to Calle by a friend, 'Yet again one of those sad cases in which you're now involved [...]', sound like an omen and, to an almost archetypical degree, like the prologue of many crime fictions.

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<sup>19</sup> Ernst Bloch, 'A Philosophical View of the Detective Novel', *Literary Essays*, trans. by Andrew Joron and Others (Stanford: Stanford University Press, [1962] 1998), 209-227, p. 213. Interestingly enough, Bloch also plays with the connotation of a vehicle in movement.

<sup>20</sup> See descriptions, respectively, p. 265; p. 263 & p. 264.

<sup>21</sup> See Sophie Calle's comment on the genesis of the work: Christine Macel, 'Interview-biographie de Sophie Calle', *M'as-Tu Vue?*, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-84 (pp. 82-83).

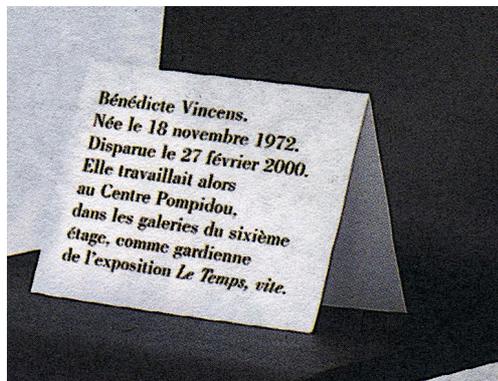


Fig. 45 (Installation View)



Fig. 46

### *Une Jeune Femme Disparaît* (Sophie Calle, 2003)

Of course, the investigative dimension of the installation does not go beyond these introductory elements. Calle's approach amounts more to what Wollen describes as one of the three ways of looking at the crime scene: a 'connoisseur of death and decay'.<sup>22</sup> Here, the 'scene of the crime' does not provide the artist with an occasion to solve a mystery but relies instead on an 'aesthetic of aftermath', as Ralph Rugoff puts it.<sup>23</sup> In other words, the fascination also arises from the scene's temporal structure and the virtuality of reconstitution and interpretation of the past.

## SEARCHING FOR TRACES: THE INDEX

As Mulvey pointed out, the backward movement of detection is intrinsically linked to the search for and deciphering of clues, and for Wollen, '[c]rime stories are always about memories and traces. They take place in a world of recollection and ruin, a world whose dominant emotion is always sliding toward melancholy.'<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, the French word *indice* is equally employed in common use as index and clue, thus emphasising the intrinsicality of the forensic connotation in the indexical sign, and conversely. Moreover, the index bears the trace of a prior existence, a 'having-been-there', as Barthes puts it,<sup>25</sup> which ties in with Bloch's idea of a *prehistory* of the

<sup>22</sup> Peter Wollen, 'Vectors of Melancholy', *op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>23</sup> Ralph Rugoff, *Scene of the Crime*, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Wollen, 'Vectors of Melancholy', *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>25</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the Image', in *Image, Music, Text*, Essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath, 5<sup>th</sup> edn (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 32-51 (pp. 44-45).

detective novel. Let us not forget that Charles Sanders Peirce defined the index through a physical connection with the object to which it refers.<sup>26</sup> As a result, the photographic image is widely considered as the indexical trace par excellence, and as Peirce said himself, photographs

are in certain respects exactly like the objects they represent. But this resemblance is due to the photographs having been produced under such circumstances that they were physically forced to correspond point by point to nature.<sup>27</sup>

However, the photograph's indexicality is often confused with its iconic properties, and the physical connection of the index by no means implies a necessary physical resemblance or analogy between the sign and the represented object. Peirce even adds that a sign does not refer so much to its object

because of any similarity or analogy with it [...] as because it is in dynamical (including spatial) connection both with the individual object, on the one hand, and with the senses or memory of the person for whom it serves as a sign, on the other hand.<sup>28</sup>

With this as a backdrop, it would be expected that the photographs of Clotilde shown in *Histoire* fill their role as iconic and indexical traces. However, the viewer quickly suspects that they do not constitute helpful clues for Mariana since they are group photographs (fig. 47). Because they appear in full screen mode, they are de-contextualised, and the physical link with Clotilde cannot be established through them because, as iconic referents, they only seem to emphasise Mariana's frustration of not remembering her mother. Which one of these people is Clotilde? The spectator is never told. Mary Ann Doane insists on the importance of the two aspects contained in Peirce's definition: the trace and the deixis.<sup>29</sup> The photograph is not indexical because one recognises its content, of course, but because it leaves a trace, a photochemical imprint of the object photographed.

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<sup>26</sup> Charles S. Peirce, 'Elements of Logic, vol. 2', in *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), pp. 156-173.

<sup>27</sup> *Id.*, p. 159.

<sup>28</sup> *Id.*, p. 170.

<sup>29</sup> Mary Ann Doane, 'The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity', *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Criticism*, 18: 1 (2007), 128-152.



Fig. 47: *Histoire d'un Secret* (Mariana Otero, 2003)

If the resemblance with the object on the photograph is nonetheless based on the principle of iconicity, the photograph itself, as index, is an empty, ‘hollowed-out sign’<sup>30</sup> and confirms all the more so the indexical trace as a ‘prehistorical’ sign. The index does not say anything, it only *shows* by pointing to the return of the dead in the photograph, what Barthes calls the *spectrum*.<sup>31</sup> Thus, as indexical signs, the photographs of Clotilde only provide a trace of her existence whilst their emptiness and ghostliness embody the void left by her death as well as Mariana’s memory loss. In the same vein, Rosalind Krauss stresses the spectral dimension of the index, which she compares to the ‘ghostly traces of departed objects’.<sup>32</sup>

The presence of photographs of Clotilde only seems to enhance a sense of crisis and lack: Mariana does not remember her mother and, therefore, it does not suffice to know what she looked like and where she stands on the photographs since she cannot recognise her. Tom Gunning has a point when he argues that the fascination with photography, which is due to ‘a continuing sense of a relation between the photograph and a preexisting reality’ – which is precisely where indexicality lies –, has perhaps less

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*, p. 133.

<sup>31</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Vintage Books, [1980] 1993), p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> Rosalind Krauss, ‘Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America’, *October*, Volume 3 (Spring 1977), 68-81, p. 75.

to do with indexicality than with experience.<sup>33</sup> His conclusion is that ‘the important relation that a photograph bears to a past moment involves more than an indexical relation, worthy of more in-depth discussion, which labelling it as an index does not fulfil.’<sup>34</sup> In line with this, the photographs, whose indexicality cannot be denied, fail to provide Mariana with what she is looking for: a connection to her mother in terms of experience, while she was still alive. In the present case, given Mariana’s absence of memory, that is, of shared experience with her mother, the photographs have nothing to offer beyond their mere indexical and iconic reference, which is insufficient. Gunning’s call for a phenomenological approach is perhaps also helpful to explain the significance of the paintings in embodying the absent mother. Similarly, as he writes about Sophie Calle, Yve-Alain Bois opposes photography to painting, and dismisses the former’s ‘spectral character’, ‘immateriality’, ‘absolute idealism’, as well as its ‘disembodied coldness: pure index of the “this has been”’, in favour of the latter’s ‘smell of turpentine, the cooking of the painters, the resistance of the matters, the bodily heat’.<sup>35</sup> However, notwithstanding his provocative comparison, paintings also entail an indexical dimension in that a physical and material connection links them, like any artefact in general, to their author, beyond their value as relics. The brushstrokes left on the canvas are certainly traces of Clotilde’s gestures and the paintings bear her signature, as emphasised by one of the camera’s numerous close-ups (fig. 48). The paintings’ very existence thus harks back to Clotilde’s authoring hand, and by extension, to her fingers, which are literally and etymologically related to the index. In this sense, they are as significant for their function as trace and deictic sign as for their iconic content. Furthermore, they also build a link between Mariana, as a film-maker, and Clotilde, as a painter, in terms of artistic practice for they create a level of shared experience, in keeping with Gunning’s point, but this point will be developed further in Chapter 5 and 6.

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<sup>33</sup> Tom Gunning, ‘What’s the Point of an Index? Or, Faking Photographs’, in *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, ed. by Karen Beckman & Jean Ma (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2008), 23-40, pp. 33-34.

<sup>34</sup> *Id.*, p. 38.

<sup>35</sup> Yve-Alain Bois, ‘Contre l’image’, in *Sophie Calle, À suivre...*, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Musée d’art moderne de la ville de Paris, 1991), no page number (my translation).



Fig. 48: *Histoire d'un Secret* (Mariana Otero, 2003)

## GHOSTS

The burnt photographs in Sophie Calle's *Une Jeune Femme Disparaît*, are particularly eloquent as an expression of the index's ghostliness (figs 49-50).



Fig. 49  
*Une Jeune Femme Disparaît* (Sophie Calle, 2003)



Fig. 50

*Une Jeune Femme Disparaît* (Sophie Calle, 2003)

To a certain extent, they also evoke (*nostalgia*) (Hollis Frampton, US, 1971). In her monograph on Frampton's film, Rachel Moore suggests that the image, 'shot through with technological heat [...] is free to move on its own', as 'we actually see the equipment take this film from stillness to motion [...]'.<sup>36</sup> By equipment and technological heat, she means the hot plate on which each photograph is successively displayed, and which sets the image on fire. Moore compares the burning of the photographs to a ritual performed by the Cuna Indians in Central America who burn magazine images when a member of their tribe is ill:

In so doing, they release the spirit doubles of these photographs. [...] The burning of photographs in this film also performs a kind of healing by distraction. We wind through from real to imaginative associations,

<sup>36</sup> Rachel Moore, *Hollis Frampton (nostalgia)* (London: Afterall Books, 2006), p. 11-12.

stopping to look and ponder at times, but being propelled by the external force of film's linearity – by the future – as we go along. Each burning releases the image from its fixed place in history to metamorphose and fit a new temporal register, as well as a different signifying function.<sup>37</sup>

The burning of photographs in (*nostalgia*) similarly liberates the image from its fixed temporality. In *Une Jeune Femme Disparaît*, Sophie Calle is in the position of the onlooker as she visits and photographs the burnt apartment, so that artist and spectators alike are invited to imagine, mentally reconstitute, or invent, not only an anterior past but also a present ('Is this woman dead or still alive?' 'Where is she now?'), and a future ('How will this story end?'). One can only agree with Wollen's argument that 'the scene of the crime is a fertile site for fantasy':

There is the mesmerizing anxiety produced by contact with the abject and the uncanny, the awareness of a scene, haunted by degradation and terror, which is insistently fascinating, which suspends time and freezes the spectator into immobility yet, in the final analysis, remains safely removed from reality.<sup>38</sup>

The fascinating vanishing of Bénédicte Vincens – irrespective of whether staged or real – unleashes our fantasy as we play at imagining a woman setting her own apartment on fire to release it (and herself) from her own demons. Once again, it is not the photograph as icon or content which is relevant in this case but its indexical nature instead, as *hollowed-out* sign: the ghosts have been released through fire from their fixed moment in time to come back and haunt the present. This is all the more striking that no one knows what became of the young woman, the story thus remains open, endless and free-floating in time.

*Ghosts* (1989-1991) is also the name of an installation that Calle created around a series of paintings that were missing from their original location because on a temporary loan. To compensate for their absence, the artist asked the staff of the two respective museums to draw or describe the missing objects. She then 'replaced the missing painting[s] with these memories' (fig. 51).<sup>39</sup> Yet, who are the ghosts here? Calle recurrently plays with the literal and figurative meaning of the words she uses: in the French library jargon, a *fantôme* (ghost) is 'a card, paper or small board materialising

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*, p. 14. There is an interesting parallel with a case evoked by Adrian Forty. Drawing from Alexander Luria's *The Mind of a Mnemonist*, Forty tells the story of a man who struggled to forget things by writing them down and throwing away the pieces of paper. After a series of unsuccessful attempts, he decided to burn the pieces of paper, as if fire also had the power to beget amnesia. *The Art of Forgetting*, ed. by Adrian Forty and Susanne Küchler (Oxford: Berg, 1999), p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> Peter Wollen, 'Vectors of Melancholy', *op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>39</sup> Sophie Calle, *M'as-Tu Vue?*, exhibition catalogue, *op. cit.*, p. 393.

the absence of a document, a book taken out of a library shelf.<sup>40</sup> As a result, the ghosts could equally designate the artefacts on loan or the memories replacing them, but they could also point to the almost invisible employees of the museum interviewed for the occasion. Furthermore, among its numerous meanings, the ghost is also defined as ‘a shadowy outline or semblance, an unsubstantial image (of something); hence, a slight trace or vestige [...]’ (*OED*). In this sense, the ghosts could also be the deceased artists who authored the paintings. Finally, they could also refer more broadly to the past by a sort of metonymic process.

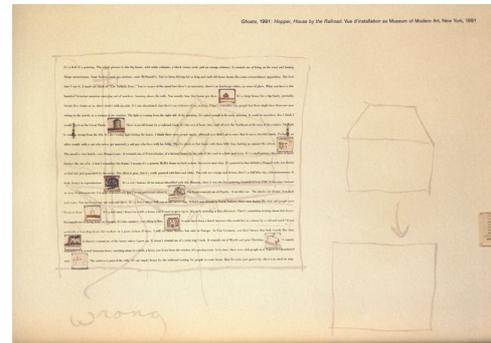


Fig. 51: *Ghosts*, Sophie Calle, (1989-1991)



Fig. 52



Fig. 53

*Last Seen* (Sophie Calle, 1991)

Ghosts also share common traits with the reconstruction process of memory as a form of ever-returning spirit from the past, which comes back to haunt present and future. Calle’s piece entitled *Last Seen* (1991) follows the same process. Here, unlike *Ghosts* in which the memories stand for the absent works, the spaces left empty following the theft are integrated into the *mise en scène* of Calle’s installation. As a

<sup>40</sup> French Dictionary *Le Grand Robert* (my translation).

result, what the spectator can see is the exhibition of an exhibition, as it were: the photographs of the empty locations are displayed together with frames containing the employees' descriptions of the missing works (figs 52-53). With this emphasis on the empty locations, the exhibition space, ironically enough, returns once more staged as a crime scene, for this time, the missing paintings were stolen from a museum in Boston. *Ghosts* and *Last Seen* form in a certain sense the two sides of a coin, which shows the dialectical relationship between past and present, between memory and loss, with the ghost on one side and the crime scene on the other.

Interestingly, Mariana Otero also refers to ghosts as she explains in an interview that *Histoire* had to allow space for the spectators to invest their own imaginary, to project their own ghosts onto the film.<sup>41</sup> She thus conceived the film as a space, not only for the ghost of her mother but also for those of every spectator, in keeping with her desire to give the film a broader social significance.

## THE INDIVIDUAL VERSUS HISTORY

### *FROM PRIVATE TO SOCIAL INVESTIGATION*

In *Histoire*, after the secret has been revealed and the painful subject of the abortion tackled, the film shifts from the personal drama to the investigative documentary as Mariana tries to give her mother's death a social and political resonance. In the above-mentioned interview, she explains her desire to make a film that would not be limited to a personal scope but that would reach out to a wider social one. In addition, Clotilde's role as a mother is slightly undermined in favour of her status as a painter. Throughout, Mariana and her sister do not refer to her as *Maman*, but as Clotilde. This is perhaps because, having no memories of her or of any motherly gestures, they recognise in her the painter more easily than the mother, in the same way as the paintings are more *revealing* than the photographs. In other words, they might feel a stronger connection with Clotilde through a common artistic path: Mariana became a film-maker and Isabel an actress. Consequently, the intimate and private dimension of this story is soon transcended so as to reach a collective social and political dimension.

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<sup>41</sup> Mariana Otero, 'Interview with the Director', DVD bonus material of *Histoire d'un Secret* (Blaq out/Archipel 35, 2004).

Sixty minutes into the film, after another panoramic *driving* shot of the landscape, which serves as a transition, Mariana is inside a building. She walks down a spiral staircase that leads to a basement room full of shelves stacked with files and folders (fig. 37, p. 113). In the semi-obscurity, she grabs a folder from the shelf and starts flickering through archive documents. The camera then cuts and shows a close up of newspaper clippings from the 1960s about cases and trials related to illegal abortions (fig. 54).



Fig. 54: *Histoire d'un Secret* (Mariana Otero, 2003)

This scene comes immediately after Antonio's first explicit revelations about Clotilde's wish to end her pregnancy, and precedes a sequence in which Mariana tries to call people whose names appeared in the archive material. The responses are startling: here, one interlocutor explains that a man refuses to tell his children what happened to their mother, there, Mariana is abruptly prompted never to call again. The following sequence, in which Mariana talks to Clotilde's 'old school' gynaecologist, provides a stark contrast to the next, in which she interviews Joëlle Brunerie-Kauffmann (Fig. 38, p. 113). This section of the film, which only lasts nine minutes in total, constitutes Mariana's only attempt to tackle the issue of abortion at a more public and social level. The result looks like the statement of a frustration: the reluctance of some interlocutors to acknowledge the reality of back-alley abortion only points to the actuality of a taboo that still pervades society four decades after its legalisation. Hence her need to make her private story public: the revelation of the secret and the denunciation of the taboo are all the more effective that the story publicly exposed is personal and intimate. Yet, this also emphasises nevertheless the antagonism between Otero's desire to remember and society's attempt to forget.

*ERASING THE PAST*

This is in keeping with David Lowenthal's point whereby 'individual forgetting is largely involuntary [...]. Collective oblivion, on the other hand, is mainly deliberate, purposeful and regulated'.<sup>42</sup> However, a distinction must be made between the desire to forget (or simply ignore) from the part of society as a collective entity and recurrent official decisions to erase and/or reconstruct the past. The most common example of 'purposeful and regulated' oblivion usually takes place after the radical change of political regimes.

In 1996, Sophie Calle was invited by Matthias Arndt to present a work in his gallery in Berlin. Having no particular connection with the city, she first declined the offer but eventually accepted on the condition that the project be site-specific. She thus 'went to Berlin for the first time in [her] life in order to *investigate* the *disappearing* of certain symbols having a political character.'<sup>43</sup> The way in which she proceeded is very similar to that in *Ghosts* and *Last Seen*, as she asked passers-by or residents to reminisce, describe, and comment on symbols and monuments that were missing throughout the Eastern part of the city. The work combines photographs of such emblematic sites; people's remarks; and finally, photographs of the symbols that had been removed. The texts include (sometimes contradictory) descriptions of the missing objects as well as personal comments regarding their *disappearing*. As in *Ghosts* and *Last Seen*, the investigative connotation is inherent to her approach, as she clearly states in the above quoted introduction. This is reinforced by the confusion among several participants who believe that certain symbols have been stolen.<sup>44</sup>

Interestingly, the German and English title of the exhibition, *Die Entfernung/The Detachment*, is very different from the title of the subsequent adaptation into a book for the French speaking public, *Souvenirs de Berlin-Est (Reminiscences of/Souvenirs from East Berlin)*. While the latter explicitly refers to memory and almost alludes to a holiday trip from which one would bring back *souvenirs*, the original title not only denotes the physical removal of the objects but also connotes people's psychological and physical distancing – willingly or not – from these objects and from a reality that is now behind them. In other words, it points to the process of memory effacement already at work.

<sup>42</sup> David Lowenthal, Preface to *The Art of Forgetting*, *op. cit.*, p. xi.

<sup>43</sup> Sophie Calle, *Souvenirs de Berlin Est* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1999), p. 5 (my translation and my emphasis). This introductory presentation is only present in the French book version; all references hereafter correspond to the bilingual (German and English) exhibition catalogue: *Die Entfernung = The Detachment* (Berlin: G + B Arts International/Arnt & Partner Gallery, 1998).

<sup>44</sup> Sophie Calle, *The Detachment*, *op. cit.*, p. 16-17.

Several descriptions are quite vague and even erroneous; as a passer-by laments: ‘I think it consisted of two figures, but unfortunately one forgets so quickly’.<sup>45</sup> Even if the aesthetic, political, and personal judgements about the removed objects are very contrasted, one gets the sense that a small majority of participants is reluctant to see such emblems disappear, as if their memory as East Germans were being erased. About the emblem partly dismantled on the façade of the Palace of the Republic, a witness notes that ‘[n]ow it’s gone and with it perhaps the possibility of remembering’ (figs 55-56).<sup>46</sup> Although this is not the place to go into a thorough discussion on the implosion of real socialism, a brief historical digression will be useful here.<sup>47</sup>

While the overwhelming majority of East Germans welcomed the fall of the Berlin Wall, the programmed erasure of any trace of Eastern Germany by the West German authorities, in order to facilitate the reunification of the two countries and of its peoples, fuelled some resistance and sometimes even a strong negative reaction among many East Germans throughout the nineties. This is certainly due to a combination of factors, which will not be developed here, but which might well include the fact that the removal of GDR symbols was a top-down decision made by West German government officials shortly after 1989.<sup>48</sup> This amounted to an implicit injunction to forget. This attitude is very perceptible in *The Detachment*, which was only made seven years after the fall of the wall when the differences between Western and Eastern Germans were still extremely perceptible. A passer-by observes that, ‘[t]he empty frame now refers to the situation in general. I don’t think we need to preserve and reconstruct everything. We could just leave things as they are. As traces. Rather than make way for Coca-Cola signs’. This person is probably alluding to the controversial removal of the peace dove designed by Picasso and replaced by a hoarding (figs 57-58).<sup>49</sup> This resonates with Derrida’s point whereby ‘there is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory.’<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Sophie Calle, *The Detachment*, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>46</sup> *Id.*, p. 26.

<sup>47</sup> For a detailed overview, see *Berlin, l’effacement des traces: 1989-2009*, ed. by Sonia Combe, Thierry Dufrière, & Régine Robin (Lyon: Fage, 2009). This is the catalogue of an exhibition held at the Musée d’histoire contemporaine – BDIC in 2009, which includes an interview of Sophie Calle about her work in Berlin.

<sup>48</sup> Calle quotes an announcement purportedly made in June 1992 by the Berliner Chamber of Deputies: ‘Whenever a system of rule dissolves or is overthrown, the justification for its monuments – at least, those which served to legitimize and foster its rule – no longer exists.’ *Die Entfernung = The Detachment*, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>49</sup> Sophie Calle, *The Detachment*, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>50</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, *op. cit.*, p. 4, footnote n. 1.

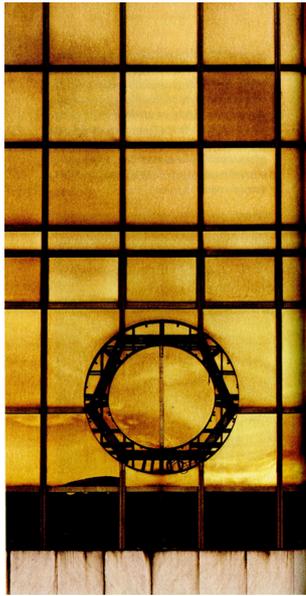


Fig. 55



Fig. 56



Fig. 57



Fig. 58

***The Detachment* (Sophie Calle, 1996)**

The fate of the Palace of the Republic is very emblematic in this respect: the Parliament voted in favour of its pulling down in 2003 and the building was dismantled between 2006 and 2008, despite a significant protest movement in favour of its preservation. Yet, the Palace had itself been built in 1951 over the *Berliner Schloß* (Berlin Castle) severely damaged by the Allied bombings during World War II. Notwithstanding numerous protests at the time, the new authorities of the GDR had decided against its rebuilding and demolished its remaining ruins, on the grounds that the castle symbolised imperialism and monarchy. Perhaps also, one may wonder, as a desire to erase the recent memory of the Second World War. In any case, the authorities voted in 2007 for the reconstruction of the castle, a restoration, in all meanings of the

term, that many view as a reactionary return to the past and an attempt to rewrite history. Adrian Forty points to similar debates regarding the reconstruction of churches that took place, respectively, in Russia (Church of Christ the Saviour) and Dresden (Frauenkirche). For him, '[t]he lesson of both the Dresden and the Moscow projects is that the filling of a void, whose emptiness had exercised diverse collective memories, ends by excluding all but a single dominant one.'<sup>51</sup> Hence the paradoxical resistance against the imposed incentive to forget what one strived to get rid of anyway. This repetition of history is very well expressed in *Disgraced Monuments* (Laura Mulvey & Mark Lewis, UK, 1994), a documentary set in Moscow about the removal of monumental statues and busts of emblematic figures of the Soviet era. The film provides an interesting parallel to *The Detachment*: in the film's opening sequence, the voice-over narrator aptly notes that the pulling down of monuments does not mark 'the beginning of a new era but the repetition of a familiar pattern', something that the recurrent circular camera movements emphasise particularly well.

#### SOCIAL PERFORMANCE

To those who argued that the Palace of the Republic no longer had any reason to exist,<sup>52</sup> it can certainly be retorted that, quite on the contrary, the building, which generated attraction for its 'GDR aesthetics', had acquired a new signification by the late nineties, as it had been turned into a temporary venue for underground art, as well as cultural and entertainment events. While this may pertain to a general nostalgic feeling,<sup>53</sup> it might also be in part a collective reaction against forced amnesia. Nevertheless, this way of re-taking possession and thereby of ascribing new meanings to desecrated monuments goes against the need of the new regime to control its new iconography and is in keeping with what art critic Viktor Misiano says in *Disgraced Monuments* about the Dzerzhinski statue: 'I remember clearly the crowd desecrating the monument... They would have been content to paint it blue with polka dots, they would have been happy leaving Dzerzhinski where he stood... but... Popov, the mayor of Moscow, had signed a decree calling for the dismantling of statues people hated so

<sup>51</sup> Adrian Forty, 'Introduction', in *The Art of Forgetting*, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>52</sup> See footnote n. 48.

<sup>53</sup> The so-called *Ostalgie* phenomenon (*Ost* being the German word for East) that emerged throughout the 1990s and which led many to fetishising 'anything East German'. The domestic (and international, for some) success of films like *Sonnenallee* (Leander Haußmann, Germany, 1999), *Allee der Kosmonauten* (Susanne Reck & Sash Waltz, Germany, 1999), and, of course, *Goodbye Lenin* (Wolfgang Becker, Germany, 2003), is in this sense emblematic.

much'. For the critic, removing the statue 'marked the end of the "performance" and the start of the mechanism of history, when the mechanisms of the new ideology began to work again.'

Many East Germans experienced their country's reunification with West Germany as an annexation.<sup>54</sup> This resulted in an implicit perception that the fall of the Berlin Wall had generated a victor, the West, and a defeated, the East and by extension its people, thereby excluding them from their own victory. In this sense, Calle's performance enables people to reclaim the public space to express their personal memories and opinions. The testimonies are particularly tainted with subjective and individual experience: one reminisces nostalgically how he learnt to count using the number of soldiers in a bronze group of fighters, while another used to assimilate a bust of Lenin to a frightening monster. Forty gives credit to Paul Connerton for having pointed out that, 'as far as societies are concerned, material objects have less significance in perpetuating memory than embodied acts, rituals and normative social behaviour.'<sup>55</sup> As a result, *The Detachment* shows how the act of reminiscing, more than the object itself, perpetuates the memory of the object gone, including in its negativity, that is, as forgotten object. And in this sense, it embodies a certain return to the *performance* against the 'mechanism of history', as Viktor Misiano puts it. It gives way to a form of social and popular (re)action against and interpretation of the old as well as the new ideology. In other words, this work provides an artistic space for people to assert and reclaim their right to collective and individual memory.

#### THE VISIBILITY OF EMPTINESS

Forty observes that 'the destruction of buildings and monuments – iconoclasm – must be the most conventional way of hoping to achieve forgetting'.<sup>56</sup> In this sense, he argues, a film like *Disgraced Monuments* emphasises a great paradox: the removal of such items has left empty plinths throughout the city, 'above which the voids were as noticeable as the sculptures that stood on them previously had been invisible'

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<sup>54</sup> The debate was still vivid two decades later. See, among others, *Der Spiegel* online, 29 August 2010, <<http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,714409,00.html>> [accessed: 4 April 2015]; *Die Zeit Online*, 31 August 2010, <<http://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2010-08/platzeck-wiedervereinigung>> [accessed: 4 April 2015].

<sup>55</sup> Adrian Forty, 'Introduction', in *The Art of Forgetting*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> *Id.*, p. 10.

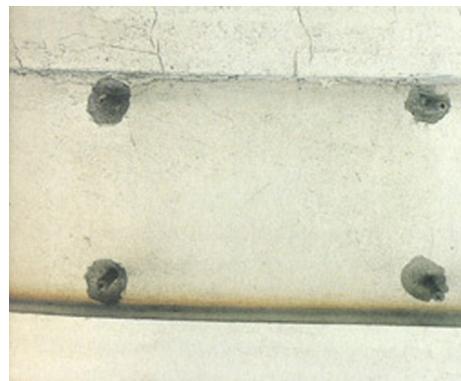
(fig. 59).<sup>57</sup> Similarly in *The Detachment*, removing the GDR symbols has left a trace as visible, if not more, as the removed objects themselves: here, a street name is crossed and a new street sign hangs just below (fig. 60); elsewhere, the holes on a wall hint at a commemorative plate that once hung there (fig. 61), not to mention the ‘empty frame’ left on the façade of the Palace of the Republic (fig. 55, p. 137).



**Fig. 59: *Disgraced Monuments* (Laura Mulvey & Mark Lewis, 1994)**



**Fig. 60**



**Fig. 61**

***The Detachment* (Sophie Calle, 1996)**

Sophie Calle’s work thus points to several elements: on the one hand the missing object, one of her issues of predilection, and the attempt to erase memory. On the other hand, to replace the missing object with memory has become a recurrent pattern throughout *Ghosts*, *Last Seen*, and in this latter project. While objects are generally taken for

<sup>57</sup> Adrian Forty, ‘Introduction’, in *The Art of Forgetting*, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

substitutes for or even analogues of memory,<sup>58</sup> Calle reverses the process whereby memory becomes the substitution element: an era is over, the objects are gone but we always have the memories, as it were. Yet, for how long, since the reminiscences are often distorted? One cannot but see a certain irony in Calle's approach, for using memories as substitution amounts to replacing a void by a future void, considering their ephemerality. Still, the work thereby resulting also counteracts this tendency by inscribing in time the memories of individuals, yet together with their inaccuracies. For Mikhail Yampolsky,

[d]estruction and construction can be understood, in a certain context, as two equally valid features of immortalisation [...] A tradition has developed historically to build a new monument precisely on the site of the old one, as though accumulating in one place two commemorative gestures: vandalism and the erection of a new idol.<sup>59</sup>

As a result, for Forty, the lessons of iconoclasm are more likely to prolong rather than shorten memory. Thus, rather than erecting a new idol, to paraphrase Yampolsky, Calle erects people's testimonies in the place of missing symbols. And as Pierre Nora puts it, 'the less memory is experienced collectively, the more it will require individuals to undertake to become themselves memory-individuals [...]'.<sup>60</sup> This is not to claim that individual memory is becoming a substitute for collective memory but, instead, irrespective of whether people welcome or deplore this 'effacement', that these personal reminiscences represent on the whole a way to compensate for the attempt to erase collective memory. They highlight by the same token the forgetting process, whether forced or natural: just as the object becomes more conspicuous through its absence, the erroneous details in the testimonies are almost more significant than an exact description as they point to the duality – forgetting and remembering – of the memory process. That is why Calle's piece has rightly been linked with James E. Young's concept of counter-monument, for she arguably creates a memory work through void

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<sup>58</sup> According to Forty, there has been an assumption in the West since the Renaissance and until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that 'material objects, whether natural or artificial, can act as the analogues of human memory'. *The Art of Forgetting*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>59</sup> Mikhail Yampolsky, 'In the Shadow of Monuments', in *Soviet Hieroglyphics: Visual Culture in Late Twentieth-century Russia*, ed. by N. Condee, London: British Film Institute, 1995), pp. 93-112 (p. 100), also quoted in Adrian Forty, *The Art of forgetting*, *op.cit.*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>60</sup> Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History', *op. cit.*, p. 16.

and absence made visible.<sup>61</sup> Interestingly, Lisa Baraitser suggested a similar comparison with respect to Otero's film, which she sees as a statement of absence (of the mother and of memories), and thus as a work of counter-memory.<sup>62</sup>

#### BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL MEMORY

Forty argues that personal and collective forgetting are equally necessary, yet distinct processes, even though 'there has been a tendency to confuse the memory of individuals with the memory of societies, and to attempt to explain the one through the other.'<sup>63</sup> This has perhaps to do with the fact that, for Maurice Halbwachs, individual and social memories cannot be comprehended separately given that individual memory is necessarily constituted in relation to a group. As Paul Connerton puts it:

Every recollection, however personal it may be, even that of events of which we alone were the witnesses, even that of thoughts and sentiments that remain unexpressed, exists in relationship with a whole ensemble of notions which many others possess: with persons, places, dates, words, forms of language, that is to say the whole material and moral life of the societies of which we are part or of which we have been part.<sup>64</sup>

Otero's endeavour to rely on her relatives in her film in order to reconstruct the jigsaw of Clotilde's story reflects precisely this process. So does Calle's collection of varied personal testimonies: as contradictory as they may be, they all partake of and contribute to a common social and memory background. In Halbwachs's words, 'memory relies on the social circle'; moreover, he posits a collective memory as well as social frames of memory that the individual one falls into and to which it participates.<sup>65</sup> In other words, one feeds itself through the other.

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<sup>61</sup> James E. Young, 'The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today', *Critical Inquiry*, 18: 2 (Winter, 1992), 267-296. The connection was established by Matthew Griffin in 'Undoing Memory', *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, vol. 22, 2, Berlin (May, 2000), 168-170. However, his reading of Calle's piece as establishing a junction between 'the Holocaust memorial with the history of the GDR' (p. 170) might appear as a little farfetched. In his introduction to *The Art of Forgetting* (*op. cit.*), Forty also provides enlightening descriptions of Jasper Johns's *Memory Piece* (Frank O'Hara) and Rachel Whiteread's *Jewish memorial in Judenplatz*, Vienna, as counter-monuments.

<sup>62</sup> Lisa Baraitser, 'Maternal loss, Counter-memory, and the Transformation of Time', unpublished paper delivered at the Symposium on *Filming the Absent Mother*, Birkbeck Institute for the Moving Image; Birkbeck Institute for Social Research; MAMSIE 14 June 2014, <<http://www.bbk.ac.uk/arts/research/birkbeck-institute-for-the-moving-image/podcasts-and-videos/podcast-filming-the-absent-mother>> [accessed 29 April 2015].

<sup>63</sup> Adrian Forty, *The Art of Forgetting*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 36.

<sup>65</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994 [1925]), pp. V-VI. See also, by the same author, *On Collective Memory* [1941], trans. by Lewis A. Coster (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992).

This also comes across very clearly in Vincent Dieutre's work. Although, at first sight, Vincent may seem indifferent to the world around him, it would be wrong to undermine the importance of the social, political, and historical context in his films, most particularly in *Mon Voyage* and *Bologna*. In the former, he subtly intertwines his personal stories with evocations of Germany's tragic twentieth century. For example, he evokes the assassination of Rosa Luxemburg whose body was subsequently thrown into the canal, while the camera reveals a footpath running along a river in a long static shot. Elsewhere, he makes implicit allusions to the rise of the Nazi regime, as the camera displays here and there shots of racist wall graffiti; at one point, he also evokes, as if in passing, the sound of marching soldiers. The former division between East and West is also mentioned, of course, especially as Vincent and Itvan reach Weimar, Leipzig, and eventually Berlin. Meanwhile, the collective suffering such as the aftermath of the war, Germany's split or the RAF terrorist attacks, is also told through the personal stories of his former partners, so that these painful events are not disembodied but, on the contrary, concrete and experienced from within: Georg has been stuttering since childhood as a result of the Allied air raids over Stuttgart, while Werner spent time in jail because of his involvement with a radical left terrorist group.

In *Bologna*, the Italian Years of Lead constitute more than a mere contextual backdrop, the intertwining of personal memories with history is clearly established since he experienced the events first hand. Vincent was fifteen years old when he first stayed in Bologna in July 1976; he was hosted by Vittorio, a political activist involved with the radical left group *Lotta continua*, and whom he had met through a common friend. Vittorio introduced him in turn to his neighbour, Sandro, who became Vincent's first lover. As a result, the weight of history, which Vincent witnessed directly through Vittorio's political activities, is inseparable from his subjective and intimate experiences. At the end of the film, he explains how, having left the city several years earlier, he found himself travelling through Bologna one day in 1980, and spent the afternoon there while waiting for his connection. This was four days before the bombing, which destroyed the station and killed eighty-five people, an event that Vincent uncannily feels related to: 'I always had the impression that I had a connection to it' (*j'ai toujours eu l'impression que je n'y étais pas étranger*). It does not mean that he had a personal involvement in the bombing, of course, but rather that, during the years spent in Bologna, he had found himself at the very heart of this society on the verge of explosion. He also explains about his drug consumption that it is with Vittorio

that ‘things became dangerous’, an expression whose ambiguity encompasses the more general context of violence and turmoil. At the same time, the bombing of the station, which marked, in his view, the beginning of a new Italy, as he puts it, also coincides with a moment of rupture in his own life: his last visit to Bologna before eventually returning thirty years later, when he made the film. Hence, the spectator presumes that this turning point also corresponds to the end of his relationship not only with Sandro, but also with a certain group of people, many of whom died a tragic death as Vincent explains towards the end of the film. As a result, and although he did not appear to have any involvement in political activities, personal and political events are not simply running on parallel tracks but are intricately linked.

## THE ARCHIVE

### *THE CRISIS OF TRANSMISSION*

According to Connerton, Halbwachs neglects the relevance of ritual performances inherent to social memory. By ritual performance, he essentially means ‘acts of transfer’, for instance, the transmission of memory from an older to a younger generation.<sup>66</sup> To some extent, *The Detachment* enacts such a transfer by enabling a group to share and thus transmit its personal memories of an era. In what way is this comparable to such a different work as Mariana Otero’s *Histoire*? While Calle provides the space for this transmission, Mariana appears in the first instance in the position of recipient: in order to compensate for her individual memory loss, she seeks the transmission of her relatives’ own memories, even if these cannot replace, let alone trigger the return of hers. For all that, the film is not a mere enterprise of memory collection, it does not stand for memory but, quite on the contrary, expresses its void, as Baraitser points out. It is in this respect that Otero’s film and Calle’s performance point to similar elements, including in their function as counter-monuments. The first is a statement of Mariana’s amnesia and, to a certain extent, the paintings are a constant reminder of Clotilde’s absent body, just as the empty plinths in Calle’s performance are a reminder of the statues gone.

As Halbwachs argues, the individual memory is also dependent on the group. Had Mariana been told about Clotilde throughout these years, had her relatives helped her

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<sup>66</sup> Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

maintaining alive a more familiar image of her mother, she might still remember her today. Intergenerational transmission thus lies at the heart of *Histoire*, which is not only about making a personal drama public, but also echoes a historical phenomenon.<sup>67</sup> The film draws a genealogy of silence, from the personal, intimate secret to the wider, social consensual taboo. In this sense, Otero re-establishes the transmission interrupted on a private scale, by her father's silence, and on a public one, by the pervading taboo. At the same time, the film opens up a space for transmission by also pointing to the latter's crisis, epitomised by the secret and the ensuing memory loss. Here, the father is the factor of transmission, or lack of it for that matter, because he withheld the secret, before eventually releasing it many years later. There is once again an interesting parallel with Alina Marazzi's *Un'Ora Sola ti Vorrei*.<sup>68</sup> Beyond the differences already mentioned, their films share a lot of striking similarities. Both were released around the same time – respectively 2003 and 2002 – and both women were born within a year of each other. Both lost their mothers around the same age and time in history, 1968 for Otero and 1972 for Marazzi, a period of dramatic social and political turmoil. Yet, more strikingly perhaps, both mothers died a taboo death: abortion in the first case, suicide in the second. Furthermore, in *Un'Ora Sola ti Vorrei*, the archive is also controlled by Alina's father (strangely enough, also called Antonio), and her maternal grandfather, the producer of the family's extensive film footage. Finally, both women have no or hardly any recollection of their mother. This accumulation of coincidences, beyond the uncanny fascination they arouse, certainly does not allow for a systematisation of the Father's role, let alone in a psychoanalytic sense. However, the two films allow for a broader conceptual questioning of the limits and even insufficiency of the archive, which, as Derrida points out, are already contained in the archive itself. In other words, as rich as the archive may be, it also manifests itself in its negativity, be it in the shape of memory loss or of the mother's death here.

The way in which Dieutre's *Mon Voyage* deals with generational transmission is tinted with melancholia and also points to crisis. In one sequence, Dieutre compares Itvan to himself as a child. The scene takes place in the car at night. Vincent is driving and Itvan is sleeping next to him. Over the panoramic *driving* shot of the snowy landscape at dusk, Vincent tells, almost whispering, the story of a child who listens to

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<sup>67</sup> The film's title has been translated into English as *History*, rather than *Story of a Secret*, thus emphasising the historical, rather than personal scope of the narrative.

<sup>68</sup> As a reminder, the film deals with the suicide of Marazzi's mother in 1972, when she was only seven years old. See Chapter 2, pp. 78-79.

opera while sitting on his grandfather's lap, before eventually falling asleep. Because it is woven together with the operatic plot,<sup>69</sup> the spectator does not immediately realise that this is Vincent reminiscing his childhood, before he spells it out: 'You sometimes fall asleep like that, all of a sudden, entirely, like this child I am no longer.' This sequence stages a *mise en abyme* of the transmission process, from his grandfather to Vincent, and from the latter to Itvan; yet, the transmission does not only consist of (grand)fatherly love and affection, but also of the love of music, painting, and art in general. Like his grandfather perhaps did with him, so too, Vincent takes Itvan to concerts, museums, has German poetry read throughout the film, and tries to transmit his love of German culture to the teenager about to settle in Berlin.

Itvan, however, does not always accept Vincent's attempts to pass on the baton: on one occasion, he walks out during the intermission of a classical concert to which they went together, wanders throughout the city and ends up in a bar to play video games, while Vincent has fallen asleep on a bench as he waits for the boy to return. If this rejection is somewhat trivial, Dieutre also stages a more tragic crisis of transmission. They have just left Weimar, and the snowy road unfolds onscreen in a forward *driving* shot. Suddenly, the camera zooms in rapidly on a road sign (fig. 62). In the next shot, the car has stopped on the roadside, Itvan gets out and runs away in the snow, followed by Vincent who is calling out to him (fig. 63). Once they are back in the car, a long moment of silence ensues, only interrupted by the sound of the windscreen wipers and a very brief sequence of the musicians. The scene speaks for itself, but Vincent eventually comments later on Itvan's refusal to visit the concentration camp: 'After all, it was up to you to decide. [...]'. While these sequences point to the rejection inherent to the process of growing up, Dieutre also points the memory of the Shoah as another kind of transmission crisis: to what extent can the unrepresentable be *transmitted*?

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<sup>69</sup> *Der Freischütz* (*The Marksman*), Carl Maria von Weber, 1821, based on an old Germanic folktale.



Fig. 62



Fig. 63

**Mon Voyage d'Hiver (Vincent Dieutre, 2003)**

*THE CONTROL OF THE ARCHIVE*

Intergenerational transmission also raises issues of control and power, on a private as well as political level.<sup>70</sup> Derrida associates the archive's topological and nomological (law and order) principles in what he calls the *patriarchic function*,<sup>71</sup> which answers the need for an authority, namely that of the *patriarch*, the *Father*, to exert its power. Among the case studies, Otero and Marazzi's respective films point to this control over the archive, and Calle's performance in Berlin to an attempt by official authorities to take control over collective and individual memories of a part of the population. What is at stake is thus the way in which individual and, more importantly, artistic gestures may counteract this control of *sites of memory* by the authorities, be they political or family. Their respective approaches also suggest new and alternative forms of transmission. Otero and Marazzi's endeavour consists in regaining control over the memory of their respective mother and giving her a place or a voice again. For this, they had to make sense of the archive material (in a large sense) that they had at hand: the paintings for the former and the extensive family footage for the latter. In so doing, they also had to assert their position and contest the authority figure embodied by the father whose role is understood here on a metonymic level. These works thus denounce the *patriarchive*, which also contains its own failure, the failure of transmission.

Derrida explains that his work of deconstruction of the archive also tackles the 'institution of limits *declared* to be insurmountable', so that its limits are no longer fixed and stable: 'order is no longer assured'.<sup>72</sup> This is perhaps where the crisis of transmission lies, or more exactly, of a certain type of transmission, that conceived in its

<sup>70</sup> The gendered dimension inherent to the archive is examined in Chapter 6.

<sup>71</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>72</sup> *Id.*, p. 4-5.

traditional vertical representation, from the old to the new, from top to bottom. In her film, Marazzi reads off screen several letters written by her mother and addressed to her father, in which she expresses her growing resentment towards her parents and complains about their disparaging comments. More strikingly, she suffers from the fact that they do not seem to take her depression seriously, which also denotes an intergenerational conflict, as the crisis of transmission breaks the link between parents and daughter so that the latter feels in turn unable to transmit anything to her own children. This failure is reinforced by the fact that Luisa presumably suffered from postnatal depression, a subject that Marazzi treats in a subsequent film mixing fiction and personal archive material about her mother.<sup>73</sup> To some extent, Luisa's death implicitly epitomises the intergenerational conflict that also lay at the heart of the 1968 revolt, whereby a young generation rebelled against its fathers. Thus, the archive, as Derrida rightly argues, also entails the possibility of its own destruction, the possibility 'of a radical perversion, indeed, a diabolical death drive, an aggression or a destruction drive: a drive, thus, of loss.'<sup>74</sup> Luisa's suicide embodies this radical perversion of the archive.

In their search for traces and in the resulting works, the artists are simultaneously exploring and constituting archive material and consequently pointing to that crisis of transmission. Catherine Russell aptly notes that staging the encounter between the artists and their parents or grandparents is a recurrent theme in many contemporary self-representational films. For her, 'the difference between generations is written across the filmmaker's own inscription in technology. [...] One often gets the sense that the filmmaker has no memory and is salvaging his or her own past through the recording of family memory.'<sup>75</sup> Here, however, these works try to go beyond the transmission of their elderly relatives, the grandfather in Marazzi's case and the grandmother in Otero's, whose strong catholic beliefs are also at the origins of the taboo around Clotilde. Educational scientists recurrently argue that transmission does not merely consist of a one-way act of transfer from an active emitter to a passive receiver but requires instead the personal implication of both teacher and pupil and, in addition, functions in both directions. Similarly here, the films partake, however unconsciously, of such a perception of transmission: a dialogue between generations resulting in a work of art

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<sup>73</sup> *Tutto Parla di Te (All About You)*, Alina Marazzi, Italy, 2012).

<sup>74</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>75</sup> Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: the Work of Film in the Age of Video* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 1999) p. 278.

through which the younger also transmit and share their experience with their elders. In a sense, Calle's work also opens up a space for a horizontal dialogue that undermines hierarchical relations of power and control over collective memory. To paraphrase Derrida, the boundaries between who detains and processes the knowledge and who receives it are no longer assured.

#### QUEST FOR THE INACCESSIBLE NARRATIVE OF THE ORIGINS

The work by artists, and in particular self-referential artists, points to a perpetual quest for knowledge, for a narrative of the origins, through their own. At the same time, they have never seemed so aware of the impossibility of this endeavour, which has perhaps more to do with *chora* than with the archive.<sup>76</sup> But what is it exactly? Or rather, what is it not? In the *Timaeus*, Plato defines the term as a space or a receptacle, and even ascribes maternal connotations to it, despite it fundamentally being an aporia, which resists any attempt at definition. Julia Kristeva puts the emphasis on its instability when describing it as 'an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases'.<sup>77</sup> Elsewhere, she argues that it points to the 'instability of the symbolic function in its most significant aspect – the prohibition placed on the maternal body'.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, for Derrida, *khôra* cannot be fixed in a denomination or definition; it belongs to neither the sensible nor the intelligible but instead, to what he calls a third genre (*triton genos*).<sup>79</sup> Considering the concept's resistance against any reductive analogical or metaphorical comparison, the point in opposing archive and *chora* is not to establish a metaphoric opposition in terms of male (*patriarchive*) versus female associations. Yet, it is worth clarifying in which ways the two might be opposed.

Firstly, if the archive means (among other things) beginning, for Derrida, *khôra* is *situated* beyond the origins, which resonates with the prehistory implicitly present in the investigative narrative. This is not to say that one amounts to the other, but another interesting aspect in Bloch's idea of prehistory or *Urwelt*, in addition to the proper questions of temporality it raises, is the uncertainty principle on which it is based and

<sup>76</sup> Derrida uses the spelling *khôra*, but the predominant one is *chora*, which will be preferred here unless used in direct reference to Derrida's book, *Khôra* (Paris: Galilée, 1993).

<sup>77</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. by Margaret Waller; intr. by Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, [1974] 1984), p. 25.

<sup>78</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, *op. cit.*, p. 14. However, the semiotic and psychoanalytic framework in which she defines the concept will not be explored here.

<sup>79</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Khôra*, *op. cit.*, p. 90-92.

which precisely prompts the plot. While in the classical detective story, this uncertainty will most often be resolved and dissolved, in the examples described here, it resists persistently, like a perpetually unresolved drama. Furthermore, as *commandment* (including via the metaphor of the patriarch), the archive is once more being overridden. The works examined here, especially those of Otero, Marazzi, and Calle, embody a certain challenging of and distance from the ruling authority represented respectively by the social taboo and secrecy, the grandfather's images of the family, and the endeavour of a country's ruling authorities to erase the past. Finally, and as already mentioned, the *impossible something* striven for in the endeavour of self-representation has perhaps to do with *chora*, precisely because the latter epitomises the impossibility of naming and materialising, in other words *fixing*, the void, in particular that left by the mothers' death, as far as Otero and Marazzi are concerned.

## THRESHOLD

The questions discussed in this chapter range from a wide diversity of issues and the works are in this respect extremely heterogeneous. Yet, to varying degrees, all the artists deal with similar articulations: the topographic relation to temporality, the constant awareness of the impossibility to represent absence, be it that of the deceased relative, memories gone, objects, or the past, of course. Meanwhile, these works raise crucial questions of transmission, tension between individual and collective memory, as well as between memory and history. Pierre Nora points to a shift from social memory to individual psychology, something of which the considerable expansion of self-referential practices is a clear symptom. For Nora, this is because memory as a social practice no longer exists, so that we, as individuals, take it upon ourselves, as an individual constraint, to perpetuate it.<sup>80</sup> In this respect, both Otero and Calle, the first at an intimate and the second at a more social level, create *sites of memory*, they metaphorically erect a monument (or rather, a counter-monument) where memory has been erased or is on the verge of being actively erased. As for Dieutre, his work on memory relies on an aesthetic exploration of temporality.

Mariana Otero's film is the mental journey of an investigation back into the past, in search of a lost space that coincides with her childhood and her lost memory. However, as the investigation progresses, the journey also moves forward, from a

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<sup>80</sup> Pierre Nora, 'Between History and Memory', *op. cit.*, p. 16.

personal, towards a public, social, and political level. While she retraces and tries to reconstitute the prehistory that led to Clotilde's death, her film also points to interesting questions such as the value and relevance of the indexical sign, a discussion central to the ontology of the photographic image. At the same time, her film shows the impasse of trying to reconcile her own desire to remember with society's eagerness to forget about clandestine abortion. Sophie Calle is recurrently described as self-centred and yet, *The Detachment* could hardly be characterised as narcissistic, let alone self-referential. Nevertheless, it remains consistent with the artist's recurrent exchange with the Other. Moreover, although the examination of her oeuvre does not reveal a particular interest in the past or issues of temporality, her curiosity for other people's memory has to do with the fact that it lies, just as for Otero, in a similar tension between memory and amnesia, between presence and, more than absence, disappearing, which harks back to the *having-been-there-once* of the missing object, and thus to its genesis. It is her quasi obsession with lack, absence, and even mystery that prompts her investigations. Meanwhile, *The Detachment* also touches on the relationship between social, collective, and individual memory as well as amnesia, and, in this sense, also points to the broader question of the artist's role in this articulation. Vincent Dieutre's approach to temporality breaks with linear representations of past, present, and future. As a result, the collapse of time in his strategy of re-enactment induces a confusion of identity, posited as a state of *translation* in which he seems to find himself. At the same time, he deals more than it would appear at first sight with the articulation between the public and collective versus the private and individual, so that historical, political, and personal events are closely entangled.

Interestingly, Berlin, as perhaps the most emblematic *topos* of the tumultuous twentieth century brings Calle and Dieutre together. *Mon Voyage d'Hiver* closes on a sequence that gathers together the different issues raised here: in Berlin, now that Itvan has joined his mother, Vincent is alone again. A static shot of a street along which the Berlin Wall used to run shows Vincent, his back to the camera, abandoning his luggage on the footpath and walking away from the camera. At the same time, the acousmatic sounds grow in crescendo while a cross-dissolve shows the Berlin wall gradually re-emerging where it used to stand (figs 64-67).



Fig. 64



Fig. 65



Fig. 66



Fig. 67

***Mon Voyage d'Hiver* (Vincent Dieutre, 2003)**

The sounds include music, or rather, musical instruments being tuned before the start of a concert, gunshots, the sounds of hammering or drilling. The shooting undoubtedly evokes the Second World War, but probably the Cold War as well and the East Germans shot while trying to leave the country as they climbed the wall. As for the hammering sounds, they suggest the noise of a building site, such as the construction of the wall in 1961 as much as its destruction in 1989. Yet, one may also recognise in this sound the frenzy of the reconstruction of the city throughout the 1990s, which suddenly turned into a large-scale building site for several years, and therewith the eager attempt to erase all traces of a certain past.<sup>81</sup> In this sequence, Dieutre succeeds in combining a double metaphor: that of his own departure, between past and present which coalesce into one, perhaps into a possible future (his death?); and that of the superimposition of historical moments, which seem to repeat themselves, something that the soundtrack emphasises particularly well. Just as the personal and the collective are intertwined, one metaphor sustains the other. In this context, Benjamin's concept of the dialectical image comes to mind:

<sup>81</sup> This general feeling was epitomised in a sentimental comedy, eloquently titled *Das Leben ist eine Baustelle* (*Life is a Building Site*, Wolfgang Becker, 1997, Germany). The film also deals with unemployment, and Eastern versus Western German tensions against the backdrop of Berlin presented as a gigantic building site.

[I]t's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly, emergent.<sup>82</sup>

The concomitance of past and present events (and even future ones in this case) in Dieutre's piece could not be described more adequately. Georges Didi-Huberman sees the power of Benjamin's dialectical image as a 'power of threshold' (*'une puissance du seuil'*), that is to say, a moment of passage between *what has been* and the now, a space of its own, characterised by its double temporality of integral actuality and openness on all sides.<sup>83</sup> In this sense, the recurrent and already developed issue of transition and in-betweenness in Dieutre's work also finds resonance in this idea of threshold, or passage, as it were. Hence his predilection for the road – or the street in this case – which is unsurprisingly also present in this final scene.

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<sup>82</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland & Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA; London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 462.

<sup>83</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman, *Devant le Temps, Histoire de l'Art et Anachronisme des Images* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2000), pp. 115-116.

## CHAPTER 5. EMOTIONS, SENSATIONS, AND THE BODY

If the previous chapter closes on the disappearance of the body, not only Vincent's but also that of Clotilde, of Luisa or of Calle's mother, this one brings it back to the fore, thus shifting from reconstructions of memory, as well as representations of absence and of the past, to bodily presence and inscription. In the context of self-representation, it is all the more significant that the body onscreen is that of the artist. The issues examined in this chapter will thus revolve around the impact of this presence in terms of affect and sensation. To various degrees and in different ways, Dieutre, Otero and Calle are all concerned with the themes discussed here.

Sensations entail an emotional and spiritual dimension, which partakes nonetheless of bodily reactions, ranging from melancholia to nostalgia to mourning and even mysticism, which will be explored in the first instance. While such feelings are still linked to representations of the past, the materiality of the body also points to *presence*, that is, to a sense of *nowness*, by contrast with the reconstruction of a past self and with the *having-been-there* (in topographic as much as temporal terms) described so far. In line with this, suffering has a prominent, albeit not exclusive, place here; it may be abstract, diffuse, and emotional on the one hand, yet, it is also concrete, physiological, and organic on the other. At the same time, the suffering condition of the body also raises the issue of the abject as defined by Julia Kristeva, especially as far as Vincent Dieutre is concerned. Last but not least, sexuality and eroticism are, of course, key elements in this heightened physicality of the body. From a theoretical perspective, the concept of figure also proves a useful framework in its emphasis on physicality and the sensible, all the more so that the aesthetic qualities of the medium eventually point to its own materiality and hapticity.

### MELANCHOLIA

In keeping with the above mentioned comparison that Didi-Huberman establishes between the Benjaminian dialectical image and the threshold, Yves Hersant also identifies in-betweenness with melancholia: 'in melancholic imagination, figures of the

*in-between* are always ascribed a place of choice'.<sup>1</sup> One may also add that melancholia tends to be associated with contemplation and therefore slowness, which is itself also a threshold between movement and stillness. Hersant also makes an interesting connection between melancholia and history as he argues that 'a narrow complicity links history with melancholic experience'.<sup>2</sup> Although he is not explicitly referring to Benjamin's dialectical image, he posits in a comparable way that Antiquity pervades modern melancholia, which comes across as a 'present-past, a repetition of the inaugural, [...] it is impossible to grasp [melancholia] without going back to the origins'.<sup>3</sup> This also harks back to the debate opened up earlier about the search for the narrative of the origins, and epitomised by Derrida's concept of *khôra*.

Again, Dieutre's films are a good illustration of the connection between melancholia and in-betweenness as both pervade his work, most especially *Mon Voyage d'Hiver*. The film acutely renders the mood of German romanticism, a melancholic movement par excellence, while also suggesting that the latter pervades German contemporary culture as well as landscapes, in other words, that melancholia is inherent to German culture across time. In addition to Schubert's Lieder, the musical soundtrack also consists of excerpts by Robert and Clara Schuman, Beethoven, and includes diegetic extracts from popular songs.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, texts and poems by German emblematic authors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Bertold Brecht, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Ingeborg Bachman, as well as the already mentioned Paul Celan, are recited or read throughout the film.<sup>5</sup> The melancholia present in these different works is thus imprinted on the film's snowy landscapes, static frames, and carried on through Dieutre's soft voice over.

By and large, Vincent's melancholia finds expression through nostalgia and thus

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<sup>1</sup> Yves Hersant, 'Cinémélancolie', *Positif: Dossier Mélancolie et Cinéma*, ed. by Michel Ciment, 556 (June, 2007), 82-85, p. 84 (my translation). The term melancholia is used in this chapter in its generic and polysemous definition or, to paraphrase Hersant, in the multiplicity of its dimensions, much more than in the Freudian sense as a pathological manifestation of grief (broadly defined today as depression); Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, (1914-1916)*, ed. by James Strachey, vol. 14, 12<sup>th</sup> edn (London: The Hogarth Press, 1995), pp. 237-260.

<sup>2</sup> Yves Hersant, ed., *Mélancolies, de l'antiquité au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2005), p. xv (my translation).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> The Lieder of the *Winter Journey* are based on poems composed by German romantic poet Wilhelm Müller (1796-1827); the film also features *Der König in Thule*, based on Goethe's eponymous poem (1774). Diegetic popular songs include Edith Piaff's *La vie en rose* and Zarah Leander's melancholic *Ich steh' im Regen*, which is part of the soundtrack of Douglas Sirk's *Zu neuen Ufern* (Germany, 1937).

<sup>5</sup> It is not a coincidence that all (with the exception of Brecht) belonged to the Group 47, a literary circle that significantly transformed German literature after the Second World War.

its emotional investment in place for his films also deal with his personal ‘wounds of returning’, as Frampton puts it.<sup>6</sup> These wounds of returning are both temporal and geographic: Vincent confronts himself with the wounds of the past as he revisits the foreign cities of his youth and intertwines stories of lost love, drugs, etc. with the wounds of history. Moreover, his marginality and melancholy is a continuous condition of his homosexuality, in resonance with Richard Dyer’s own reminiscences: “‘Melancholy’ was one of my favourite words; I felt it summed up my condition, for it caught – and here is the real trap – that peculiar mixture of pain and beauty that I took to be the condition of homosexuality’.<sup>7</sup>

As a difficult voyage into the past, into the *history* of the secret, *Histoire* also entails a degree of melancholia, which emerges out of Otero’s effort to contain the strong emotional charge, which would otherwise have been too overwhelming for the protagonists of her personal tragedy.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, the film is marked by a certain distance and level of restraint, hence the long silences, contemplative pauses, and scarce musical chords which punctuate the investigation, as well as the recurrent shots of the countryside whose colours – dominant shades of green, grey, and brown – echo Clotilde’s landscape paintings. The film’s melancholia is evidently the sign of Mariana’s loss and her awareness of this loss.

## MOURNING

All the works here have a therapeutic value in that they provide the artists with a space to mourn their respective loss – childhood, youth, loved ones. Freud defines mourning as ‘the reaction to the loss of a loved person’ and adds that ‘we rely on [mourning] being overcome after a certain lapse of time, and we look upon any interference with it as useless or even harmful’.<sup>9</sup> Mourning is thus a normal and even desirable phase, however difficult and painful, during which the subject detaches him/herself from the loved one: ‘all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to

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<sup>6</sup> Hollis Frampton understood the word in the literal meaning of the Greek roots: *nostos* (homecoming) and *algos* (pain). Quoted in Rachel O. Moore, *Hollis Frampton (nostalgia)*, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Dyer (essay co-written with Derek Cohen), *The Culture of Queers* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> Something that she indirectly confirms when she explains that, at first, she was unable to look at her mother’s paintings. See the bonus track of the DVD release, *op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, *op. cit.*, pp. 243-244.

the loved person', at the end of which 'the ego becomes free and uninhibited again'.<sup>10</sup> What is especially striking in this process is the relevance of materiality and the various attempts by Calle, Dieutre, and Otero to ascribe a degree of concreteness to this detachment, as if to compensate for the loss.

#### LOVE AND DEATH

Calle excels at dealing with her failed relationships by staging her heartaches and therapy is the explicit starting point of *Double Blind, Douleur Exquise* (1984-2003), and *Prenez Soins de Vous (Take Care of Yourself, 2007)*.<sup>11</sup> In *Douleur Exquise* (which retraces the mourning of a relationship that ended in 1984) in particular, she shows particularly well the importance of time described by Freud in the process of mourning. While the first section has already been examined in Chapter 2, the second space (the reconstitution of a hotel room) and the third one ('After the pain') will be analysed more in detail here.

The hotel room embodies the moment and location of pain because this is where Sophie received the telegram from her partner and understood that her relationship was over. The space is an approximate reconstitution of the hotel room in Delhi, which builds a spatial and narrative transition – almost like an airlock – between the other two sections (fig. 68). The tragic aspect of the installation is slightly toned down by the temporal gap between the event (1984) and the moment of the exhibition (2003), as well as by the title: *exquisite pain*. In the medical sense, which Calle explicitly refers to, 'exquisite' means 'intense', 'localised', which can thus equally apply to pain and pleasure. Yet, 'exquisite' can also signify something sought out, of special beauty, or admirable. Once more, Calle seems to play with ambivalence so that the slippage into irony is never very far, especially given the ridiculousness of the situation: the medical emergency alleged by her partner for not travelling to India is a whitlow.

The third part, 'After the Pain', draws a picture of the healing process as another horizontal sequence of text and photographs hangs on the walls. Stories of different people about a very painful moment they experienced in their life, together with an emblematic photograph, alternate with the repetition of Calle's own story (figs 69-70).

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<sup>10</sup> *Id.*, pp. 244-245.

<sup>11</sup> Given the necessity to limit the scope of this discussion, only *Douleur Exquise* will be examined in detail here but the principle employed in *Prenez Soins de Vous* is fairly similar to that in *Douleur*.



Fig. 68



Fig. 69



Fig. 70

### *Douleur Exquise* (Sophie Calle, 2003)

The latter, thirty-six panels in total, are near identical versions of the same narrative summarising her arrival at the hotel and how she reacted to the news. The same photograph of the Delhi hotel room hangs above each of them. All panels with Calle's story invariably start with the same sentence – '[n number of] days ago, the man I love left me [...]'. Towards the end, however, as if she had got tired of repeating herself, she writes: 'It is the same story, except that it took place 95 days ago [...]' (the number of days is usually printed in red ink). At the beginning, the texts are written almost daily until the intervals gradually grow, as time washes away the pain, while the present tense in 'the man I love' on the first panels, is eventually replaced by the past tense on the second last panel. The healing process is emphasised by various other elements: the texts are embroidered on canvas whose colour lightens progressively, shifting from black in the first, to dark grey in the last panel. In a symmetrically reverse process, the colour of the text darkens gradually from white to dark grey so that in the last panel, text and canvas are almost of the same colour and can hardly be distinguished from one another. The texts become increasingly shorter, more vague and elliptic as time goes by. Thus it could be argued that the installation literally *weaves* together the story of Calle's

pain. The use of embroidered fabric also emphasises the materiality and the tactility of the installation, thus giving a concrete expression to her heartache. In the same vein, the cover of the book published for the exhibition about her mother is also made of cloth with embroidered letters, while most of the text inside is embossed on the paper, white on white. This enhances once more the need to feel and touch the object, as if to compensate for her mother's absence.<sup>12</sup> *Douleur Exquise* not only points to the process of time involved in the work of mourning, it also plays very creatively with temporality. The second and third parts contrast in very interesting ways as Calle opposes her punctual, acute, and short-lived moment of shock, associated with the hotel room, to the duration arising from her brooding over what happened, not to mention the countdown of the first part associated with impatience and excitement. The contrast thereby achieved creates a sense of movement through rhythm, which is particularly interesting given that the work is an installation.<sup>13</sup>

*Double Blind*, in addition to its focus on the failure of love, also deals with mourning death. The film is dedicated to Calle's friend, French writer Hervé Guibert who died of AIDS on the 27 December 1991, just after she had left Paris for New York. In the opening sequence, she explains that despite the obstacles, she must undertake this trip, if only to 'symbolically bury Hervé', otherwise, the film would be 'a double failure'. On the first day of the journey, the couple stop by the ocean, in which she throws a bunch of flowers and a saint icon and bids farewell to her deceased friend.

Death represents the critical moment of the disintegration of the body, that is, of the dematerialisation of being. Drawing on Lacan's concept of the Real, defined as the 'impossible' and the 'literally ineffable', Michael Renov understands death as a void: '[d]eath, like the Lacanian Real, can be understood as a founding negativity'; however, death and the Real by no means coincide.<sup>14</sup> For him (and Lacan), mourning consists in filling the gap left by the death of a loved one: 'death opens up a hole in the Real that will be filled with a "swarm of images" having perhaps ritual or therapeutic value'.<sup>15</sup> Back in 1968, Otero was denied the opportunity to mourn her mother's death because of the secrets and lies that covered the tragedy. If indeed, Clotilde's death eventually left a

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<sup>12</sup> Sophie Calle, *Rachel, Monique* (Paris: Xavier Barral, 2012). More generally, the literalizing of the expression *weaving away the pain* is a recurrent figure, as illustrated in *Brodeuses (A Common Thread)*, Éléonore Faucher, France, 2004), in which two women try to overcome their respective grief by working together as embroideresses.

<sup>13</sup> This aspect will be examined more in detail in Chapter 6.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Renov, *The subject of documentary*, *op. cit.*, p.124.

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*, p. 125.

void, it initially took shape in a much more literal way, that is, through the *disappearing* of her body, since Otero's father initially lied about his wife's death and told his daughters that she was away, preparing an exhibition in Paris. It is only a year later that, faced with the insistent questioning of the elder daughter, the family reluctantly admitted that Clotilde had died, as Isabel explains in the garden sequence (see Fig. 44, p. 121). Thus, it is as if she had not died but merely vanished. Furthermore, this first lie nurtured the girls' fantasies up until adulthood that their mother might still be alive: as the two sisters share their impressions early in the film, they realise that both often imagined recognising Clotilde in the street. The girls had also been excluded, needless to say, from the funeral ceremony usually intended to give death a concrete expression, and often expected to generate a 'swarm of images' so as to fill the void, to paraphrase Renov, but Mariana lacks such 'images'. This, together with the fact that Clotilde died and was buried almost in secret (as illustrated in the driving sequence at night, see fig. 32, p. 103), explains Mariana's endeavour to bring her mother's body back to the surface to find a means of mourning.

## SPIRITUALITY

### DEATH (SPI)RITUALISED

Calle's tribute to her mother, *Rachel, Monique*, is also a work of mourning. While she had specifically designed it for the Palais de Tokyo in 2010, she showed it again with a few alterations in the summer of 2012 at the Avignon Theatre Festival. This time, the installation included a live performance as Calle read extracts from her mother's diaries, every day for an hour (fig. 71).<sup>16</sup> The bare walls of the construction site of the Palais de Tokyo already created the atmosphere of a crypt but the religious connotation went one step further in Avignon because the exhibition was held in a church (*Cloître des Célestins*). Moreover, the artist introduced several new pieces that enhanced the spiritual and religious connotations, namely a glass coffin with a mannequin inside representing her mother (fig. 72). It is not too farfetched to see in this a parody of the glass shrine in which the supposedly intact remains of Saint Bernadette

<sup>16</sup> Calle specified in an interview that she was discovering the content of Rachel's diaries as she was reading them to the spectators. Laurent Goumarre (prod.), 'Entretien croisé: Sophie Calle et Daniel Picouly', *Le rendez-vous*, broadcast programme, *France Culture*, 13 July 2012, <<http://www.franceculture.fr/emission-le-rendez-vous-le-rdv-festival-d-avignon-s-calle-o-roenthal-d-picouly-c-anne-v-robert-w-za>> [accessed: 23 July 2012].

of Lourdes are preserved.<sup>17</sup> In fact, it would not be the first time that Calle plays with the religious iconography especially associated with Lourdes.<sup>18</sup>



Fig. 71



Fig. 72

***Rachel, Monique* (Sophie Calle, 2010-2012), installation view, Avignon Festival**

Thus, Calle went to Lourdes in 2005 on the instructions of a clairvoyant, who had read in her tarot cards that Calle should ask something to the Virgin Mary, before specifying that the investigation had to revolve about a woman, possibly a mother:

Go to the ground, in the grotto. With the people. Try to understand what it is like to live in the vicinity of the Virgin. [...] To live of a present and absent woman. Disembodied. [...] You will have to dig, to scratch... Motherly feminine ideal... Good mother... [...] You'll have to ask something to the Virgin, but what? We'll see next time.<sup>19</sup>

These words inevitably resonated with Calle's mother who was already ill at the time:

I think of my mother. Was my mother a good mother? I'm already talking about her in the past tense. She has breast cancer. Three months according to the doctors. My mother is still alive and already absent. My mother can't recover, that's clear. Even in Lourdes.<sup>20</sup>

This explains that the iconic photograph of Sophie Calle posing as the Virgin Mary (fig. 74), or replicas of the *ex votos* displayed in the Lourdes grotto (fig. 75) have been integrated in *Rachel, Monique*.

<sup>17</sup> These have been exposed since 1925 in the chapel of the Saint Gildard Convent (Nevers, France).

<sup>18</sup> The performance, *Où et Quand? Lourdes (Where and When? Lourdes)*, 2005, has been adapted into a book under the same title, (Arles: Actes Sud, 2009), see appendix, p. 267.

<sup>19</sup> Sophie Calle, *Où et Quand? Lourdes*, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*



Fig. 73



Fig. 74

***Où et Quand? Lourdes* (Sophie Calle, 2005)**

In a recent installation, *Sakis: un tombeau* (*Sakis: a Grave*),<sup>21</sup> Diecture pays a tribute to a Greek friend in a similar kind of *mise en scène*, although seemingly devoid of irony. Sakis was a man with whom Vincent had a relationship in the early 1980s, and who died of AIDS a decade later. Diecture describes his work as a ‘documentary installation’, a ‘tomb of tears, images, and sounds’.<sup>22</sup> The exhibition space is a dark rectangular room. A video of the Greek city of Thessalonica, in which Vincent never appears, unfolds on loop on two different screens. At the back of the room, a television monitor placed like an altarpiece shows in extreme close-ups the black and white photograph of a man, presumably Sakis (fig. 76). Meanwhile, Vincent talks in his usual voice over mode about his friend amidst the intertwined sound of religious orthodox songs and electronic music.



**Fig. 75: *Sakis, un Tombeau* (Vincent Diecture, 2011)**

This installation was the first of a programming series entitled *Beyond the Soundtracks*, so that the focus on sound was explicit and made on commission. As Diecture expands

<sup>21</sup> Installation presented at La Box – École Nationale Supérieure d’Arts (Bourges, France), between 8 December 2011 and 14 January 2012.

<sup>22</sup> Unpublished exhibition leaflet available on site.

image and sound in a three-dimensional space, he dissociates them from one another and gives to the sound's ubiquitous property its full meaning. This said, the narrative strategy and these aesthetic explorations are in no way unusual for him. Indeed, and as already demonstrated, Dieutre recurrently plays at decomposing image and sound while expanding the soundscape in both spatial and temporal terms. Where the installation format differs from the films is thus in the way it relies on the physical presence of the visitors to appeal to their olfactory senses as well: two racks with lit church candles were placed at the bottom of the 'televsual altar' while the room was perfumed with incense, thus recreating the atmosphere of a church. The references to Christian symbolism partake of the visitors' sensory experience and seem to solicit our compassion or some kind of emotional and physical response, as if Dieutre were inviting us to *sense* his pain caused by Sakis's death.

Sophie Calle and Vincent Dieutre seem somehow fascinated by spiritual or religious representations of death, something that probably partakes of religion's 'imaginative and emotional nature'.<sup>23</sup> Although both resort to Christian symbolism in their funerary tribute to their, respectively, mother and lover, they obviously do so in very different ways. While for the first, it heavily relies on ironic distance, for the second, it seems to partake of a mystic and metaphysical quest. In any case, this tells perhaps less about their potential religious beliefs than about their reassessment of Western European cultural heritage. It also reveals a tremendous fascination with the irrational, something that the surrealists had extensively explored in their own time, and which, as far as Calle is concerned, goes as far as to willingly submit herself to random decisions determined by a pack of cards. Nevertheless, both artists are grieving the death of a loved one in these pieces and resort to art as a way to mourn their loss, precisely through this attraction for the irrational. What, indeed, is more absurd and unexplainable than the whole process of life and death?

In Mariana Otero's *Histoire*, religion is present, albeit in a more imperceptible and unexpected way. For instance, the Calvary cross on the roadside (fig. 24, p. 85) hints at the rural catholic background in which Clotilde grew up. Her own mother (Mariana's grandmother) used to teach religion to children. In fact, she was in the middle of a lesson when the news of Clotilde's death was broken to her, as Mariana's aunt recounts: after a silent pause, she returned to her class and said a *Hail Mary* with the children. The

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<sup>23</sup> Victor Turner, quoting L. H Morgan's *Ancient Society* (1877), *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*, 7<sup>th</sup> edn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, [1969] 1977), p. 1.

conservative stance held against abortion by the Catholic Church explains in good part why Antonio lied to his in-laws about the real cause of Clotilde's death. We also learn that it was the grandmother's decision not to reveal to the girls that Clotilde had died, so that she also nurtured the secrecy and lies. As a result, Clotilde's death and, by extension, her very existence, were eclipsed by the weight of the matriarch's religious beliefs. In this context, the closing scene, which stages a retrospective exhibition of Clotilde's paintings, acts as the mourning ritual that the daughters were denied back in 1968. However, by contrast with Calle and Dieutre's *mises en scène*, the re-enacted funeral is here entirely devoid of any religious dimension, quite on the contrary. Since Clotilde's death was obliterated by religion, her existence is to be made visible, palpable, and material through her art. Moreover, this re-enacted ritual does not consist in a burial but in an exhumation, metaphorically that is, of Clotilde's vanished body through the exhibition of the paintings. As Otero explained, the image of Clotilde's nudes displayed on the wall was intended as a jigsaw retracing the enigma, and as a reconstruction, a mosaic alike, of Clotilde's own body.<sup>24</sup>

It is perhaps in this sense that Otero and Calle's respective work share some similarities for Calle also exhibits her mother's metaphoric body by way of the mannequin in the glass coffin, the full-scale photograph of the coffin (the real one this time) in which her mother lay (fig. 36, p. 111); as well as of the video of her last breath (*Pas Pu Saisir la Mort/Couldn't Catch Death*, 2007), also present in the exhibition *Rachel, Monique* (fig. 76). Overall, the sensory, tactile, and physical dimension of the various works described here appears as an attempt to materialise loss and to fill the gap left by death, as suggested by Renov, notwithstanding Dieutre and Calle's attraction for mystic and spiritual aspects of mourning. Hence the resort to objects and olfactory elements and this also applies to *Douleur Exquise*, which deals with a different kind of loss.

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<sup>24</sup> 'Discussion with Filmmakers Alina Marazzi and Mariana Otero', Symposium on *Filming the Absent Mother*, Birkbeck Institute for the Moving Image; Birkbeck Institute for Social Research; MAMSIE (14 June 2014, <<http://www.bbk.ac.uk/arts/research/birkbeck-institute-for-the-moving-image/podcasts-and-videos/podcast-filming-the-absent-mother>> [accessed 29 April 2015].



**Fig. 76: *Pas Pu Saisir la Mort* (Sophie Calle, 2007), installation view, Palais de Tokyo**

### *BETWEEN BODY AND SPIRIT*

*Leçons* opens with Dieutre's statement that he is 'returning to life'. Likewise, actress Françoise Lebrun, a friend and recurrent collaborator of the film-maker, speaks of resurrection: Vincent had already died and is now giving himself a second life.<sup>25</sup> While this is an allusion to Dieutre's hazardous *first* life as a drug addict, one can hardly ignore the parallel with the Christian figure of resurrection. However, without going as far as to claim that Dieutre is identifying with Christ, this denotes perhaps more simply a strong fascination for figures of resurrection, as well as for spirituality at large, which is particularly significant in *Leçons*.<sup>26</sup> The film's religious reference is explicit from the start and borrows its title, *Leçons de Ténèbres*, from baroque musical pieces composed for the Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday of Holy Week in Catholic Church. These *lessons* are themselves based on the Old Testament's *Book of Jeremiah*, also known as the *Book of Lamentations*, a series of five poems about the suffering caused by the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC. Subsequently, Dieutre made another film about a religious issue, *Fragments sur la grâce* (*Fragments about Grace*, Belgium/France, 2006), in which he explored the French Jansenist movement in the seventeenth century, by revisiting the location of the former Port-Royal Abbey, interviewing scholars, staging readings of emblematic texts from that period, which he mixed with his own personal stories, although to a much lesser extent than in the films discussed here.

<sup>25</sup> See Pierre Chevalier and Simon Guibert (prods), 'Vincent Dieutre: Fragments', *Sur les Docks: Passeurs de Réel* (aka *L'heure du documentaire*), broadcast programme, France Culture, 22/01/09, <<http://www.franceculture.fr/emission-sur-les-docks-08-09-passeurs-de-reel-45-vincent-dieutre-fragments-2009-01-22.html>> [accessed: 26 July 2012]. We also learn in this interview that in the early 1990s, Dieutre underwent a cure to treat his drug addiction.

<sup>26</sup> Leo Bersani also sees connections between the figure of Christ and homosexuality, as will be discussed below and in Chapter 6.

This said, as in *Sakis, un tombeau*, Dieutre does not seem so much interested in religion *per se* as in its forms of spirituality, which is something that he struggles to grasp intellectually, as he explains in *Fragments sur la Grâce*.<sup>27</sup> As a result, what drives him is a sort of *fascination* for it, that is to say, a sensation that cannot be rationalised. This is exactly what lies at the heart of his attraction for baroque painting in *Leçons*, which opens on Vincent fainting in a museum after gazing at Caravaggio's *Flagellazione di Cristo (Christ at the column, c. 1607, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen)* (figs 77-78).

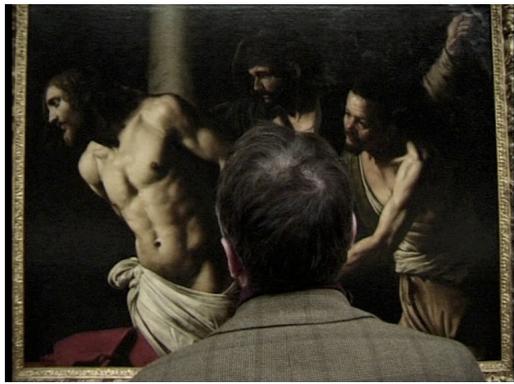


Fig. 77



Fig. 78

***Leçons de Ténèbres (Vincent Dieutre, 2003)***

Martine Beugnet aptly explains how this reaction, because it cannot be rationalised, has to be expressed in terms of bodily affect and sensation: Vincent's faint denotes 'sensory awareness'. Furthermore, 'to let oneself be physically affected by an art work or a spectacle is to relinquish the will to gain full mastery over it, choosing intensity and chaos over rational detachment'.<sup>28</sup> It could also be understood as a manifestation of the abject in Julia Kristeva's understanding of the term: the '*abject*, [...] the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses'.<sup>29</sup> Vincent is drawn to the painting, but at the same time – or is it *because?* – he is confronted with an emotion that he cannot comprehend and which is beyond rational meaning. He faints because he is attracted to something whose overpowering

<sup>27</sup> Dieutre is particularly interested in understanding Jansenism and the theological controversy that opposed Jansenists and Jesuits. Jansenism relies on Saint Augustine's thesis of the Divine Grace whereby the salvation of man entirely relies on God's gift, as opposed to the thesis of man's freewill, defended by the Jesuits.

<sup>28</sup> Martine Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation, French Film and the Art of Transgression* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror, op. cit.*, p. 2.

effect he cannot rationalise. The director himself describes this reaction as the physical consequence of the power that painting can have on a human being.<sup>30</sup>

The apparent paradox, however, is that *Leçons*, although resolutely constructed like a sensory exploration of baroque painting, is nonetheless pervaded by mysticism and spirituality, which does precisely away with the body. However, this paradox is inherent to the tension between body and soul that defines Christianity. For Jean-Marie Schaeffer, the figure of Christ epitomises this duality for he is *the ideal image* of God, yet also made of flesh and bones.<sup>31</sup> Christ, through the Passion, thus makes the bond between God and man after his fall from Eden: ‘Through his sacrifice, Christ reopens to man the possibility to come closer to God’.<sup>32</sup> In line with this, the role of the body is paradoxical:

To save man’s flesh (corrupted by sin), Man-God must sacrifice his own flesh, which has not been corrupted albeit human as well [...]. The body is thus simultaneously the conveyor of Salvation and what must be reduced or overcome in order to achieve it.<sup>33</sup>

Hence, not only is the body simultaneously essential and what must be repressed, but there is no such thing as a clear-cut separation between spirit and body.

#### THE FIGURE

Similarly, the aesthetic concept of the Figure is particularly relevant in this chapter as it points to a comparable paradox of simultaneous concreteness and abstraction, as Philippe Dubois points out in his reading of Erich Auerbach’s seminal text *Figura*.<sup>34</sup> Etymologically, ‘figure’ derives from the Latin *figura* (form, shape), which shares the same root as *figere* (to mould), or *factor* (sculptor, modeller).<sup>35</sup> Its meaning is therefore associated with materiality, and more precisely, plasticity, moulding, or fashioning. On the one hand, Dubois talks of an ‘original, material, and

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<sup>30</sup> Vincent Diestre, ‘Interview with François Bonenfant’, DVD bonus material of *Leçons de Ténèbres* (Studio Canal/Les Films de la Croisade, 2004).

<sup>31</sup> Jean-Marie Schaeffer, ‘La chair est image’, in *Qu’est-ce qu’un corps?*, ed. by Stéphane Breton (Paris: Flammarion/Musée du Quai Branly, 2006), pp. 58-81 (p. 60, my translation, as in all further quotations of this book).

<sup>32</sup> *Id.*, p. 60.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Philippe Dubois, ‘La question des Figures à travers les Champs du Savoir: le Savoir de la Lexicologie: Note sur *Figura* d’Erich Auerbach’, in *Figure, Figural*, ed. by François Aubral & Dominique Château (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1999), pp. 11-24 (my translation, as in all quotes hereafter from this book).

<sup>35</sup> *Id.*, p. 12.

quasi tactile dimension of the *Figura*, which turns it into a sort of imprint and inscribes it in the category of the *indexes* (in Charles S. Peirce's sense, as opposed to the icon and the symbol)<sup>36</sup>. On the other, Dubois goes back to Auerbach's own definitions to argue that the term also has an abstract dimension: 'Strictly speaking, *forma* means "mould" [... and] it is related to *figura* as the hollow mould relates to the three-dimensional object that it is used to make'.<sup>37</sup> The figure thus has the role of an interface between the mould and the produced object:

[I]f the 'form' corresponds to the mould in its concrete aspect, the *figura* designates the mould's model, a sort of abstract interface meaning the very idea of contact as producing an object out of a form; between mould and body, the *Figura* is somehow an intermediate operator enabling the passage from one to the other thanks to the imprint; it is an abstraction that articulates two concrete objects or, in other words, it is like the 'visual concept' that embodies the form.<sup>38</sup>

According to Dubois, Auerbach tends to mix and sometimes even revert the terms *forma* and *figure*. In any case, the Figure has two characteristics that are of interest beyond these distinctions: firstly it carries the paradoxical duality between concreteness and abstraction; secondly, it draws on the *visible* and the *sensible*, by contrast with the metaphor or the symbol, which pertain to signification and the *readable*.<sup>39</sup> There is a further evident relationship between the figure and the body: as Gilles Deleuze puts it, 'the body is the Figure, or rather, the material of the Figure'.<sup>40</sup> Just as Dubois talks about interface, Deleuze posits the body as material for the figure, that is, as an instance or surface of inscription. After all, as Dubois points out, the Latin *figura* refers not so much to the body itself as to its representation. For the Fathers of the Church, it is the reincarnation, as a mediating process, which is the figure and which establishes the link between Christ and the body, and which also harks back to Schaeffer's argument.<sup>41</sup>

With this as a backdrop, the Caravaggists' paintings shown in *Leçons* provide for Diestre, and for the viewer, an illustration of this dialectical relationship between the body and the immaterial. The baroque painters combine religious themes with great

<sup>36</sup> *Id.*, p. 13.

<sup>37</sup> Erich Auerbach, 'Figura' [1938], in *Time, History, and Literature: Selected Essays of Erich Auerbach*, ed. by James I. Porter, trans. by Jane O. Newman (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014), pp. 65-113 (p. 67), quoted in Philippe Dubois, *op. cit.* p. 13.

<sup>38</sup> Philippe Dubois, 'La Question des Figures à Travers les Champs du Savoir', *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>39</sup> François Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, trans. by Anthony Hudek and Mary Lydon (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1971] 2011), p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. by Daniel W. Smith (London & New York: Continuum, [1981] 2003), p. 20.

<sup>41</sup> Philippe Dubois, 'La Question des Figures à Travers les Champs du Savoir', *op. cit.*, p. 17.

attention to realistic detail in their representations of the body (among other subject matters). According to Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, the realism of Caravaggio's paintings was perhaps not so controversial for the Church. Although it had rejected some of the painter's later altarpieces, it generally accepted his work. Moreover, '[i]t has even been argued that aspects of his paintings criticized as showing irreverence toward their sacred subjects [...] faithfully reflect the populist tendencies within the Christian Church at the time of the Counter-Reformation'.<sup>42</sup> In this sense, the realism of Caravaggio's subjects brought God closer to *the people*, to paraphrase Schaeffer. For Bersani and Dutoit, this realism is perhaps a reflection 'on the profound humanity of Christianity, the appealing ordinariness of its origins [...]'.<sup>43</sup> In this sense, it would be too simplistic to conclude that the simultaneous presence in Dieutre's film of a certain degree of mysticism and the preponderance of sensory awareness is a mere sign of the film-maker's own contradictions. This aporia of the tension between body and soul is in fact constitutive of Christianity and is precisely what generates figures of sensation in Caravaggio's paintings, which seems to fascinate Dieutre so much.

In *Histoire*, Clotilde's paintings appear constantly throughout the film. Although Antonio did not consciously hide them after his wife's death, he locked them away for conservation purposes, among, perhaps, other unconscious reasons. The twofold aim of the final exhumation, as it were, is thus to retrieve Clotilde from oblivion as a mother *and* as a painter. In the film's last shot, the screen is gradually irised-out around her last and unfinished painting: another female nude (fig. 79).



Fig. 79



Fig. 80

***Histoire d'un Secret* (Mariana Otero, 2003)**

<sup>42</sup> Leo Bersani & Ulysse Dutoit, drawing from Walter Friedlaender (*Caravaggio Studies*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), *Caravaggio's Secrets* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998.), p. 26.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

Even though they were not self-portraits, it is difficult not to read Clotilde's own presence into the curvy and round nudes, evocative of maternity (fig. 80). All the clues lie there: a female naked body, a painter who died of the consequences of an unwanted pregnancy. This condensation of life (the pregnancy) and death (the abortion) may also suggest resurrection (the exhibition). In a sequence of *Leçons*, Leo Bersani, comments on Caravaggio's representation of Saint Jerome and argues that death is inherent to life because it gives shape to it:

In the painting of Saint Jerome, showing the passage of energy between life and death suggests that the presence of death in the body *gives a form* to all activities in life, it *informs* life. That is to say that all one does in life is inflected by the *writing* 'death', which is *inscribed* in our own body from the moment we are born. [...] And death is not merely an event that arrives at the end, but something that defines the form of the energy... and so death is almost something that *aestheticizes* life (my emphases).

To come back to *Histoire*, if death is indeed inscribed in the body *since birth*, it is perhaps not too farfetched to suggest that Clotilde's death is *inscribed* in her own paintings, for these plump nudes prefigured her own death through their – however implicit and unintended – evocation of maternity, itself bearing the hidden clues of her untold pain and agony. Yet, more crucial is perhaps the terminology used by Bersani: to inform (in the sense of 'giving a form' as he puts it); to write; inscribe, aestheticise. These words denote physicality so that he insistently ascribes a sensible quality to death, as if the latter left a material trace in the living body. Here too, Bersani's terms thus point to the Figure.

#### *FIGURES OF LIGHT: DIVINE AND DEATHLY*

Because death is beyond rational understanding, it can only be imagined, hence the focus on the visible, the traceable. The aesthetics of the works described here thus point to an attempt to see, touch, and sense what can precisely not be rationalised, understood, or remembered. The significance of light has a comparable ambivalence. In *L'attrait de la lumière*, Jacques Aumont underscores the difficulty of defining light: it is 'an element of the physical world, but its materiality is difficult to grasp: we can neither touch it, nor even see it (we only see its effects)'.<sup>44</sup> This is why light has often been ascribed an intrinsic metaphysical quality of 'permanence, omnipresence, and

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<sup>44</sup> Jacques Aumont, *L'Attrait de la Lumière* (Paris: Yellow Now, 2010), p. 24; my translation, as in all further quotations of the book.

invisibility characteristic of anything felt as present', to such a point that the metaphor of light as a manifestation of the divine has become a cliché.<sup>45</sup> Besides, the Christian tradition relies on the antinomy between light and darkness: light is divine while evil, Jesus' crucifixion, for instance, are symbolised by darkness, the *tenebrae*. As Dieutre explains in *Leçons*'s prologue, the ritual of the *tenebrae lessons* consists in putting out the candles, one by one, until total darkness is reached 'as a symbol of worldly ignorance'.

This said, light also has more concrete characteristics, as Aumont comments on a scene of *Ordet* (Carl Dreyer, Denmark, 1955), in which a dark living room is suddenly illuminated by car lights through a window on the side, while the farmer's wife is agonising in the room next door. For Aumont, this light is Death passing by, 'it suggests to us a figure of light – and "figure" here is to be understood in its full meaning, that is, of *figura*, of modelling, and of intentional artifice'.<sup>46</sup> Aumont's insistence on the term 'figure' emphasises the possibility for light, not so much to *signify* death as to ascribe a tangible shape to it. Death, he argues, is thus not merely signified through metaphor but rather made visible, modelled. Moreover, it is

[a] figure at once simple and surprising: if the car lights beaming across the room may well evoke the movement of the scythe, the traditional chromatic values are nonetheless reversed and white here, must signify death.<sup>47</sup>

If this use of white seems unconventional in Western Judeo-Christian culture, the metaphor is perhaps not so surprising given the connotation of light as divine. Life and death rely on God's will, and the white light could also be interpreted as God coming to take back his child, as it were.<sup>48</sup> Thus, and especially in *Ordet*, whiteness may also stand for death in its divine dimension.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, in *Histoire*, the very bright shot of a hospital bedroom is a clear evocation of Clotilde's death. Close-ups of the window, the ceiling, and the walls enhance the bareness and coldness of the empty white room. The spectator's gaze is then directed onto trees outside the window. The sequence seems intentionally overexposed so that even the trees appear faded by the brightness.

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<sup>45</sup> Jacques Aumont, *L'Attrait de la Lumière*, *op. cit.*, p. 24-25.

<sup>46</sup> *Id.*, p. 47.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> In The Old Testament, for instance, Job acknowledges God's will upon life and death: 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord'. Job 1. 21.

<sup>49</sup> Aumont obviously acknowledges this, and in the case of *Ordet*, it is precisely how the character of Johannes understands the meaning of these lights.

However, by contrast with the deathly white light in *Ordet*, which is perceived as divine and metaphysical, here, the brightness associated with Clotilde's death enhances a more clinical, medical, and organic dimension (fig. 81). And in this sense, Aumont's point about the figure of light is particularly relevant: through this figure of (white) light, Clotilde's invisible death is given shape, visibility, that is, organicity. The brightness in *Histoire* also embodies the exposure of truth, obviously, as the film gradually shifts from dark to brighter sequences (as illustrated in the sequence of stills, figs 37-39, p. 113).



Fig. 81: *Histoire d'un Secret* (Mariana Otero, 2003)

## THE HAPTIC GAZE

The aesthetics of the works described here emphasise in different ways emotions and sensations in their physical dimension: while the installations are tangible in essence through the presence of objects, film must rely on creative strategies such as the haptic gaze to suggest a heightened sense of physicality. The term haptic originally relates to tactile and kinaesthetic sensations. Aloïs Riegl applies it to images that suggest a sense of touch (between objects) on the picture plane, as opposed to optical images that denote distance induced by depth (and therefore perspective).<sup>50</sup> Although drawing from him, Laura Marks provides a different interpretation so as to include the viewer's perception. Her expression *haptic visuality* thus refers to a situation in which 'the eyes themselves function like organs of touch', and 'emphasizes the viewer's inclination to perceive [images]'.<sup>51</sup> On the basis of blind people's ability to draw, Vivian Sobchack points out that picturing and representation are not simply related to

<sup>50</sup> Aloïs Riegl, 'Excerpts from "The Dutch Group Portrait",' trans. by Benjamin Binstock, *October* 74 (Autumn, 1995), 3-35; see in particular footnote n. 1, p. 1; as well as pp. 25 & 30-31.

<sup>51</sup> Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 162.

vision but to a broader sense of embodied perception.<sup>52</sup> This also applies to perspective:

Perspective [...] is not merely a geometric construction of sight, a purely visual thinking of spatial relationships that are held suspended before my eyes as the in-formation of the solely visible. Rather, perspective is a *theoretical representation* of a dimension and depth that are antepredicatively *lived through* by my body.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, ‘haptics includes perspective’.<sup>54</sup> Marks also argues that, ‘while optical perception privileges the representational power of the image, haptic perception privileges the material presence of the image’.<sup>55</sup>

The works discussed in this corpus provide instances of haptic images as well as haptic visuality, the latter being enhanced by the recurrent *mise en abyme* of the protagonists, as we shall see. Moreover, the ways in which Calle bodily implies the Other in her work partakes all the more evidently of haptic perception that the latter is not only physically present – as spectator – in the exhibition space but also literally incorporated in the artist’s narrative strategy – as participant –, as in *Douleur Exquise* or *The Detachment*, to name but two. *Histoire d’un Secret* and *Leçons de Ténèbres*, in particular, rely heavily on the haptic gaze and it is perhaps not a coincidence that painting occupies a central place in both films. The way in which the paintings are filmed strongly suggests the tactility of the image, which partakes of a more general attempt to emphasise the physicality of the body and, by extension, matter. On a formal level, tactile images resort in these cases to a particular use of light, the *chiaroscuro*, and the close-up.

As Aumont points out, it is a truism to talk about light when talking about cinema for it is not only essential as a chemical component in the production of the image, but also a paramount element of the *mise en scène*.<sup>56</sup> There is even ‘something pictorial’

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<sup>52</sup> She is drawing from the work of John M. Kennedy. Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology Film Experience* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 79-82.

<sup>53</sup> *Id.*, p. 95.

<sup>54</sup> *Id.*, p. 81.

<sup>55</sup> Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

<sup>56</sup> Jacques Aumont, *L’Attrait de la Lumière*, *op. cit.*, p. 7. Even digital photography is configured according to photometric parameters. See for instance Tom Gunning ‘What’s the Point of an Index? Or, Faking Photographs’, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

about the different types and stagings of light across the films he examines.<sup>57</sup> With this as a backdrop, Dieutre, makes an interesting appropriation of Caravaggio's *chiaroscuro* in *Leçons* and this mode of representation becomes a starting point for his personal sensory explorations within the moving image. The film is almost entirely shot at night or indoors so that the light always comes from an artificial source. Sequences shot in what looks like a studio, which punctuate the diegesis like oneiric or phantasmal insertions, show Vincent in *chiaroscuro* lighting, alone or embracing his lover (fig. 82). As Dieutre explains, he is trying to recreate the atmosphere and light composition present in Caravaggist works throughout the film and these sequences are perhaps the most explicit illustration of such aesthetic experimentations. Just after the opening sequence, Vincent appears alone; the only source of light comes from a small light projector held by a technician, which hovers back and forth over and around his naked torso: light is thus mobile. The projector's movements are entangled with those of the handheld camera (fig. 83). The *chiaroscuro* thereby created sculpts the body and echoes Caravaggiesque representations – especially *Christ at the Column*, which appears in close-ups during the film credits and in full in the sequence following this one. Meanwhile, the contrasting light and shade enhances the haptic gaze. If the Caravaggist light often emanates from above, as if from a divine source, here, it is horizontal (and mobile) and comes across as a diffuse expression of emotion caused by the sensation of the bodies.

A sequence in *Histoire* resonates strongly with these, as a lateral *driving* shot of the street at night, filmed from inside a car, reveals in low-angle the flow of light beams emanating from the street lamps. We see the right side of the street, then the left, until a second cut introduces the shot of a painting by Clotilde (a female nude). Placed at the back of the car, it is intermittently illuminated by the passing lights so that a streak of shadow keeps going back and forth over it (figs 84-85). This lighting creates amber shades, which give depth to the painting and underscore the colour of the nude's skin. At the same time, it creates a *chiaroscuro* setting whose emotional charge takes on a melancholic tone, just as in *Leçons*. Obviously, this way of filming Clotilde's painting

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<sup>57</sup> Jacques Aumont, *L'attrait de la lumière*, *op. cit.*, p. 34. The influence of pictorial light on the conception of cinematic light is an evidence. In the field of practitioners, John Alton entitled his book on light: *Painting with Light* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), even if he imports the term into cinema more than he deals with painting *per se*. This title is emblematic of the extent to which painting was thought to influence cinema's techniques and vocabulary. More recently, Italian cinematographer Vittorio Storaro published a sizeable three volume piece, in which he cites paintings by Caravaggio, among others, as a major influence upon his work on light and shadow. Vittorio Storaro, *Scrivere con la Luce/Writing with Light* (Milano: Electa/Accademia dell'Imagine, [2001] 2003). (Interestingly, 'painting' has shifted to 'writing' with light in the respective titles.)

between light and shade also hints at the secret that characterises her story. Death and the taboo are suggested again through a figure of light, whereby the *chiaroscuro*, as intentional artifice, to paraphrase Aumont, models and physically marks the body in the painting.



Fig. 82



Fig. 83

*Leçons de Ténèbres* (Vincent Dieutre, 2003)

Fig. 84



Fig. 85

*Histoire d'un Secret* (Mariana Otero, 2003)

#### *THE TACTILE CLOSE-UP*

The conservationist who examines Clotilde's paintings scrutinises the canvases, from their quality and size to the lines, colours, and brush movements, after which she analyses their preparation and the painting technique used (fig. 86). From her observation, she deciphers Clotilde's temperament as an artist, in fact like a detective deduces and infers from the remains of a crime scene: Clotilde seemed more interested in paint and colour than in the precision of drawing, and she probably used thick applications of paint and vigorous strokes in most of her works, while the shapes are evasive and suggested, rather than accurately outlined. In other words, texture is emphasised. The woman's explanations are intertwined with close-ups on the canvases, which reveal their pattern as well as the thick texture of the brushstrokes (figs 87-88).

Clotilde's technique and Mariana's close-ups thus coalesce into matter and physicality, one sustains the other, which confirms what Béla Balázs says about the close-up: 'the magnifying glass of the cinematograph brings us closer to the individual cells of life, it allows us to feel the texture and substance of life in its concrete detail'.<sup>58</sup> From time to time, the conservationist regularly runs her fingers along the contours and lines of the paintings to underscore her explanations, thereby re-enacting by the same token Clotilde's own gestures over three decades earlier (fig. 89).



Fig. 86



Fig. 87

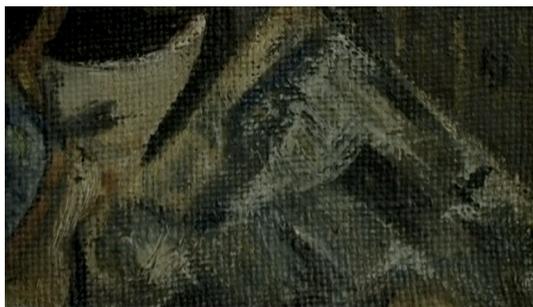


Fig. 88



Fig. 89

*Histoire d'un Secret* (Mariana Otero, 2003)

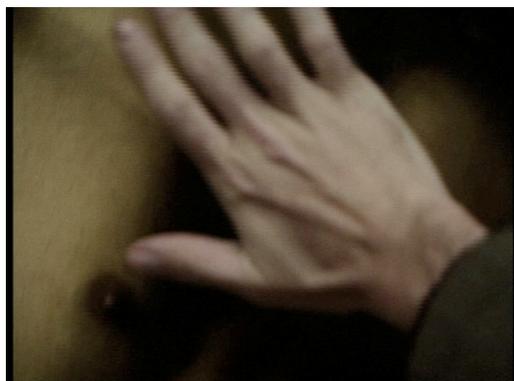


Fig. 90



Fig. 91

*Leçons de Ténèbres* (Vincent Dieutre, 2003)

<sup>58</sup> Béla Balázs, *Early Film Theory: The Visible Man and The Spirit of Film* (New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), p. 38.

Similar and even more frequent extreme close-ups on the paintings appear throughout *Leçons*. Vincent also runs his hands along the contours of painted bodies, which he eventually transposes from the paintings onto his own images, onto his lover's face in particular (figs 90-91). Marks's expression of 'tactile close-ups' is particularly appropriate here.<sup>59</sup> She mentions that Riegl used the word *haptic* instead of *tactile* because the latter might be interpreted too literally as touching and in this sense, her expression might seem confusing for it suggests that tactile and haptic are synonyms.<sup>60</sup> It has nonetheless the advantage of emphasising the property of haptic visuality which 'functions like the sense of touch' and in which haptic images 'engage the viewer tactilely'.<sup>61</sup> Otero and Dieutre's *tactile close-ups* bring indeed the viewer extremely close to the surface and establish a connection with literal touch as far the conservationist in *Histoire*, and Vincent in *Leçons*, are concerned: the hands and gestures sketched with the fingers spell out the sense of touch inherent to the films' haptic images.

What is more, the fingertips hark back to the index and, as modelling tools, they are somewhat constitutive of the Figure.<sup>62</sup> In other words, the finger enhances the relationship between Figure and index underscored by Dubois. As already discussed in Chapter 4, the paintings work more effectively for Mariana as a referent of Clotilde than the photographs. Not only do the former embody her *having-been-there*, suffering, and eventual death, but their texture and tactility, enhanced by the close-ups and light, also figure the reality of her existence more concretely than the photographs; hence their paramount significance, for they are the only physical link with Clotilde as a mother and as an artist. Touch establishes a connection, in this case, via the figure and the index, between pictorial and filmic images, and thus between mother and daughter, including through their respective artistic practice. For Otero, the haptic gaze corresponds perhaps less to an explicit aesthetic choice than to a genuine desire to *touch* her mother, not only through the latter's paintings but also through the process of film-making. As Marks appropriately notes, 'it is perhaps not coincidental that a number of haptic images are made by daughters of their mothers', for '[s]uch images evoke a tactile mirror stage in which the infant's awareness of belovedness and separation is learnt in terms of touch.

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<sup>59</sup> Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

<sup>60</sup> *Id.*, p. 162.

<sup>61</sup> *Id.*, p. 22.

<sup>62</sup> Against all odds, *finger* does not have the same etymological origin as *figure*, despite its apparent resemblance with the latter's Latin root, *figere*. Finger stems from common Germanic and tends to be related to the root of the number five (*OED*).

At the moment that the viewer forgets the body, haptic images fill in for the missing body'.<sup>63</sup> This also applies to Marazzi's *Un'Ora Sola ti Vorrei*, whereby the filmmaker's manipulations (close-ups, slowing down, and freezing of the images), come across as a desire to touch her mother's face and retain her body in the image, which draws attention to the filmic matter by the same token (figs 92-93).



Fig. 92



Fig. 93

*Un'Ora Sola ti Vorrei* (Alina Marazzi, 2002)

#### SEEING 'BENEATH THE SURFACE'

Balázs argues that the close-up can reveal the detail that the normal eye does not see, '[i]t exposes the face beneath the surface'.<sup>64</sup> As Mariana searches for traces of her mother, the close-ups on the canvases look like an attempt to detect the hidden detail *beneath the surface* (fig. 88, p. 176). Dieutre, on the contrary, seems dazed and beyond any attempt to understand, as if his vision were blurred, which is in keeping with Balázs's argument when he points out that the extreme close-ups can also blur the vision and bring the viewer beyond recognition by isolating the object from its surroundings. This is not necessarily in contradiction with the previous claim. The loss of distance produces a different kind of vision that goes beyond rational perception – the *readable* – and either reveals the invisible, or induces a sense of confusion, so that matter and substance take over visual recognition. For the spectator, the effect of the close-up is certainly a tighter involvement with the image, which can be dizzying, and which, by a process of *mise en abyme*, somehow replicates Vincent's own dizziness in front of Caravaggio's painting when he faints in the opening sequence, for instance.

Gazing beneath the surface also tends to acquire a more literal turn for Dieutre as

<sup>63</sup> Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

<sup>64</sup> Béla Balázs, *Early Film Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

recurrent images of pierced bodies represented in Caravaggist paintings appear throughout *Leçons*, starting with Christ's body as well as that of Saint Sebastian pierced by arrows (figs 94-95), among many others. Vincent's fascination for such images comes across as a desire to explore the inside of the body and perhaps, by extension, the mechanics of the image, akin to a doubting Thomas sticking his finger inside the wound of resurrected Christ.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, in the screenplay of *Histoire*, Otero shows an explicit intention to allow the spectator 'to "enter" in the painting' through the editing process, so that the extreme close-ups on the paintings seem in both films like an attempt to penetrate the canvas, as if the image had depth.<sup>66</sup>



**Fig. 94: Dirck van Baburen, *Crowning with thorns* (1623, Catharijneconvent, Utrecht)**



**Fig. 95: Gerrit van Honthorst, *Saint Sebastian* (c. 1623, National Gallery, London)**

Jean-François Lyotard also resorts to the notions of depth and thickness to explain the Figural: against the idea posited by Paul Claudel that the 'eye listens' and has to do with the legible, the audible, or the intelligible, Lyotard posits that there is 'an inherent *thickness*, or rather a difference, which is not to be read, but rather seen'.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, discourse is '*thick*. It does not merely signify, but expresses.'<sup>68</sup> In the context of modern painting, the painting makes the creating process of objects and transcendental activity itself visible and, in this sense, 'it holds the entire secret of being. Indeed, it is this very secret that the painter makes visible: the secret of manifestation, in other words of *depth*'.<sup>69</sup> That the eye goes beyond the surface and implies depth is an interesting paradox that harks back to Sobchack's point about embodied perception. In fact,

<sup>65</sup> As in the version painted by Caravaggio, *The Incredulity of St Thomas* (1601-1602, Sanssouci, Potsdam), although the painting does not appear in *Leçon de Ténèbres*.

<sup>66</sup> Mariana Otero, 'Scénario d'*Histoire d'un Secret*', *op. cit.*, p. 91.

<sup>67</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, *op. cit.* p. 3 (my emphasis, as in the following quotations).

<sup>68</sup> *Id.*, p. 9.

<sup>69</sup> *Id.*, p. 24.

Liotard also cites Paul Klee who purportedly claimed that the painting is to be grazed: ‘painting is not something to be read, as contemporary semiologists would have it. Rather, as Klee put it, it has to be *grazed*, it makes visible, giving itself up to the eye as the exemplary thing it is [...].’<sup>70</sup> To *graze* the painting implies its penetration into our body through the mouth down to the innards. The connotation of animality thereby implied underscores the organic dimension of the body, which is at stake here. The terms depth and thickness also contribute to emphasising the idea of penetrating *an inside*, as opposed to the plane surface of a *legible* object. Thus, for Lyotard, a figural apprehension of discourse calls on the senses, whereby vision and taste are closely entangled, that is to say, it calls on a visceral, as opposed to intellectual or cerebral, approach. Ultimately, this emphasises the impossibility to confine the object within discourse and to fully signify, control, or rationalise. In the context of cinema, Vivian Sobchack’s expression of ‘carnal responses’ to describe the viewing experience echoes Lyotard’s claims. As she puts it, ‘the film experience is meaningful *not to the side of our bodies but because of our bodies*. Which is to say that movies provoke in us the “carnal thoughts” that ground and inform more conscious analysis.’<sup>71</sup> One could go further and conclude that film experience is also meaningful *inside our bodies*.

## THE RETURN OF THE BODY

### *PAIN, OR THE REALITY OF EXISTENCE*

The recurrence of pain, suffering, and illness in the corpus also highlights the organic dimension of the body. Georges Canguilhem writes that for the ill person, ‘[t]he state of health is a state of unawareness where the subject and his body are one. Conversely, the awareness of the body consists in a feeling of limits, threats, obstacles to health’.<sup>72</sup> *Doleo ergo sum*, as it were, *I ache, therefore I am*. Suffering thus enhances the feeling of *nowness* and consciousness of being and here, the expression of pain and suffering is certainly central. Calle’s exposure of her pain constitutes the backbone of her artistic being. For Otero, while *Histoire d’un Secret* deals with her mother’s suffering and eventual death, including in its clinical dimension, and contributes to

<sup>70</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>71</sup> Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley; Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2004), p. 56 & 60.

<sup>72</sup> Georges Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological*, trans. by Carolyn R. Fawcett and Robert S. Cohen (New York: Zone Books, 1989), p. 91.

asserting the reality of her organic being, it is also tinged with the suffering of the entire family, hence the strong emotional constraint that permeates the film.

This is all the more true in the case of Vincent Dieutre. Suffering undeniably pervades all his films, and is both physical and existential. In all the works discussed here, Vincent systematically evokes pain and death and his installation, *Sakis, un tombeau*, is yet another example. In *Rome*, he talks about the death of his friend Quintino, who thus becomes the fifth victim of AIDS in Rome; another one is found dead in public toilets, presumably of a drug overdose; his friend Giovanna is mourning the suicide of her partner Xavier. In another sequence, over the static shot of a building, perhaps a hospital, he tells of a visit to a friend in a psychiatric institution. Such a dizzying accumulation of death and desolation creates a diffuse sense of malaise, which reflects Vincent's drug addiction and recurrent withdrawal symptoms. As *Bologna* brings together his first love experiences and the growing political agitation in Italy, the spectator learns, near the film's end, about the death of his close friends Vittorio, the political activist, and Isabella, who had initially brought him to Bologna. She committed suicide while no one knows what happened to the former, not to mention the numerous victims of the station's terrorist attack and whose names Vincent reads out in the film's final sequence.

In *Mon Voyage*, as the viewer travels with the director through the scarred landscape of a formerly divided Germany, passages related to illness and death punctuate the film as well. Here, however, pharmaceuticals have replaced heroine and the morbid atmosphere of *Rome* and *Bologna* has become altogether more sensible and clinical: Vincent is getting older. He is often seen taking medication, sometimes furtively, between two doors, as if he were hiding (fig. 8, p. 62). When he and Itvan visit Georg in Stuttgart, after a long static shot of Georg's medicine cabinet in the bathroom, the two men talk about the dosage of Georg's medication in a low tone, as if trying to escape from the intrusive presence of the video camera (fig. 96). In another sequence, Vincent, later joined by Itvan, is standing in front of a grave in a cemetery, and tells in voice-over mode about a deceased friend called Tom. *Leçons* contrasts with these examples insofar as suffering is externalised, that is, conveyed by the Caravaggiesque bodies. Also, the film focuses on Vincent's *resurrection*, that is, the period of recovery from his addiction, even if the issues of drugs and death still haunt him. In any case, as in *Mon Voyage*, medication and illness, that of his partner Tadeusz in particular, are also evoked.



**Fig. 96: *Mon Voyage d'Hiver* (Vincent Dieutre, 2003)**

These examples attest to the pervasiveness of death, illness, and Vincent's existential malaise. Overall, one senses an overwhelming presence of violence through these numerous and precocious deaths, whether caused by suicide, drug overdose, or illness, the latter unsurprisingly referring to AIDS and HIV given Vincent's drug addiction and homosexuality, a dangerous combination indeed at times of 'pre-HIV' awareness. Such an insistence on suffering harks back to Canguilhem's point, as if Vincent were looking for evidence of his existence to counterbalance his pervasive invisibility and in-betweenness.

#### *THE ABJECT BODY*

Indeed, what strikes the spectator in *Rome*, paradoxically, is Vincent's own absence from the screen. This denotes, as already stated, a lack of involvement with life and an apparent indifference, which appear as a typical syndrome of drug addiction. As he explains:

Too many dead people piling up behind me, none of whom I have really missed like I miss, every evening, around 5 o'clock, heroin, which, for a short instant, beyond any pleasure, beyond the beauty of Rome, gives my life the only meaning it has ever had.

As already discussed in Chapter 2, the discrepancy between the tone of his voice and the sadness of the stories he tells enhances his own feeling of indifference and detachment, on the one hand, and, on the other, the border maintained by society to repress its 'ugliness' and relegate people like him at its margins. This also applies to his homosexuality, which is another factor for mutual indifference, or rather, for invisibility since gays are 'hidden' and 'invisible', as Richard Dyer argued.<sup>73</sup> As a result, the constant references to illness and death not only counterbalance one another, but are

<sup>73</sup> Richard Dyer, *The Culture of Queers*, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

dialectically related to Vincent's overwhelming feeling of absence and invisibility, which is, once again, a sign of the in-betweenness that characterises his persona.

In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva describes abjection as such:

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. *It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. [...]* But simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned. *Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself.*<sup>74</sup>

These words find a strong resonance in the work of Dieutre whose approach resolutely lies in the tension between the desire to lose himself and a vague attempt to make sense of his place in the world. The very indirectness of Kristeva's definition of the abject, which she encircles more than she delineates,<sup>75</sup> is also representative of the difficulty to express or clarify the impression that we might feel as embodied spectators, caught as we are in the tension between the repulsion and fascination that underlies Dieutre's mode of self-representation (especially in *Rome Désolée*). It may simply have to do with discomfort, yet such an explanation is insufficient. His fascination for morbidity and death may also partake of a form of violence and disgust characteristic of the *violent and dark revolts* mentioned by Kristeva.

This is particularly relevant in the context of *Rome* and *Leçons*. The first deals with the abject more explicitly than the second, and is Dieutre's darkest film in terms of mood, perhaps because, as his first feature-length film, *Rome* represents his first occasion to artistically come to terms with a difficult period of his life. *Leçons* was his second feature-length film and echoes the previous one in many respects, especially as one of its sections also takes place in the Italian capital. The final sequence of *Rome* shows a Gypsy man begging on the pavement with a child on his lap, like a contemporary and male variation of the *pietà* (fig. 97). There is a comparable scene in *Leçons*: huddled up around his walking stick, a man is sleeping on the pavement among indifferent passers-by (fig. 98). The camera's insistent gaze (sixteen seconds long) is also a way for Dieutre to force the audience to look at what it would rather ignore. Elsewhere, a sixty-nine second (very) long shot shows a dead rat amid rubbish on the

<sup>74</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>75</sup> The first section of the book is tellingly entitled 'Approaching Abjection' (my emphasis).

pavement (fig. 99).



Fig. 97: *Rome Désolée* (Vincent Dieutre, 1995)



Fig. 98: *Leçons de Ténèbres* (Vincent Dieutre, 2000)

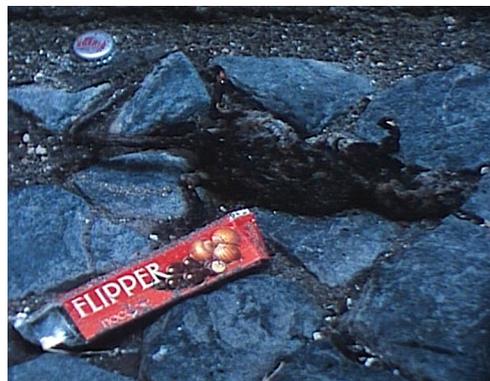


Fig. 99: *Rome Désolée* (Vincent Dieutre, 2000)

Such static takes perfectly illustrate the quote by Louis-René des Forêts, which opens *Leçons*: ‘Confining oneself to see only the world’s beauty is an imposture, which even the most clairvoyant fall into.’ The image of the dead rat is accompanied by Vincent’s impassive voice narrating off screen a sexual intercourse with a man called Bruno. In line with des Forêts’s words, the dead rat is also reminiscent of Charles Baudelaire’s poem about the rotting carcass that he and his lover find on a path. Baudelaire forces his lover’s – and the reader’s by the same token – gaze upon the ugliness of the dead animal, reminding her that such is also her destiny.<sup>76</sup> In *Leçons*, however, this scene is not a mere *memento mori* based on sensory awareness, but also denotes a strong fascination for the carcass, as a characteristic movement of abjection, a ‘dark revolt of being’, as Kristeva phrases it, against a threat (perhaps death) that simultaneously repulses and fascinates.

Furthermore, *Rome*, *Leçons*, and *Bologna*, to a lesser extent, tackle social

<sup>76</sup> Charles Baudelaire, ‘A Carcass’, *The Flowers of Evil* [1857], trans. by James McGowan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 59-63.

marginality in similar ways, hence the recurrence of comparable scenes revealing of homelessness, shabby streets, poor areas, as evoked in Chapter 2. Even the baroque paintings shown in *Leçons* depict similar environments, for they are set in a world of craftsmen, beggars, as well as revellers and prostitutes, including in the religious tableaux, which partly contributed to Caravaggio earning his sulphurous reputation. Throughout *Rome*, while Vincent's stories about searching for and taking drugs, about pain and suffering, about his feeling of detachment from the world around him, succeed one another, the camera impassively records urban scenes of desolation, such as damaged buildings, no-man's-lands, or used syringes lying on the ground. On two occasions, the camera concentrates on caravans parked in derelict areas of the city, bearing protest banners about claims for decent housing (fig. 100). These sequences are silent – yet eloquent – comments on the city's poverty and the general indifference towards it. Once more, however, if Dieutre seems to denounce the abject state of such living conditions in Italy, he also seems drawn to and fascinated by such images.



**Fig. 100: *Rome Désolée* (Vincent Dieutre, 1995) ('HOMELESS')**

This may have to do with a certain form of identification in the sense that Dieutre's own decay as a junkie seems to find a personal echo in the distress of the socially excluded he films. Paul de Man writes about Wordsworth's autobiographical work *Essays upon Epitaphs* that the recurring 'figures of deprivation, maimed men, drowned corpses, blind beggars and children about to die that appear throughout the *Prelude* are figures of Wordsworth's own poetic self'.<sup>77</sup> The parallel with Dieutre's own recurring themes is striking. This is not to posit that self-representation necessarily deals with rotting carcasses, crippled children, and beggars, as it were, but it is reasonable to argue that self-representation entails its fair share of the abject. And in these specific cases,

<sup>77</sup> Paul de Man, 'Autobiography as De-facement', *op. cit.*, p. 924.

abjection manifests itself through such figures. If we understand Kristeva correctly, the abject – which is not to be confused with the object although, likewise, it is opposed to *I* – provides a certain form of mediation between the ego and the superego:

A certain ‘ego’ that merged with its master, a superego, has flatly driven [the abject] away. It lies outside, beyond the set and does not seem to agree to the latter’s rules of the game. And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master.<sup>78</sup>

As a result, the abject teases or defies the superego from this exterior place, which is why abjection is ‘a kind of narcissistic crisis’.<sup>79</sup>

Finally, the juxtaposition of the image of a rotting carcass with the story of Vincent’s sexual encounter creates a contrast as unsettling as it is puzzling at first glance. For Kristeva, the reaction of abjection, which is triggered by the confrontation with the unclean, such as the corpse, also marks the ‘border of my condition as a living being’.<sup>80</sup> The visceral reaction thus provoked delineates the border that separates the living body from refuse and putrefaction. Dieutre’s juxtaposition of a dead animal with sex points to that line of separation; and yet, the limit is unstable, as Kristeva (and Baudelaire before her) reminds us: sooner or later, the living being will *fall* ‘beyond the limit – *cadere*, cadaver’.<sup>81</sup> Dieutre seems to point to this limit at first, only to test and challenge it immediately afterwards; hence perhaps his experience with drugs and sex. For the film-maker, the issue of addiction as a whole partakes of a way of escaping the disarray of life and lies somewhere between Eros and Thanatos. In the same context, he evokes that male orgasmic pleasure is sometimes called ‘little death’ in French (*petite mort*), therefore also situated between Eros and Thanatos. For him, it has to do with the abandon of the self, ‘which is perhaps the door to a sort of eternity, possibly that which comes after life’.<sup>82</sup> In this context, to juxtapose images of sex and death is not so much paradoxical as it is illustrative of his in-betweenness. It is a *memento mori* in this sense as well – ‘the great lesson of Jansenism’, in Dieutre’s view. And it once again translates his refusal to repress the ugliness of the world, as an artist whose role is to denounce society’s attempts at mystifying the reality of existence.

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<sup>78</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> *Id.*, p. 14.

<sup>80</sup> *Id.*, p. 3.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Pierre Chevalier and Simon Guibert (prods), ‘Vincent Dieutre: Fragments’, *op. cit.* (my translation).

## ON SEXUALITY AND EROTICISM

Whether explicitly or not, sexuality and eroticism are omnipresent in all the works under discussion here, including in *Histoire*, of course. Dieutre's point about Eros and Thanatos harks back to Georges Bataille who speaks of eroticism as 'assenting to life up to the point of death'.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, Bataille argues that the difference between a 'simple sexual activity', which consists of reproduction, and eroticism is a 'psychological quest independent of the natural goal'.<sup>84</sup> While his prefatory approach is deliberately provocative, it seems tragically illustrative of Clotilde's fate. Her abortion is the symptom of a woman's affirmation of her sexual desire, freed from the natural objective of reproduction; an affirmation that went as far as risking death. As Joëlle Brunerie-Kauffmann, the gynaecologist interviewed in *Histoire*, reminisces about women who underwent such back alley operations, she is still surprised to note that 'there was such a strong taboo, such fear of going to jail [...] and yet, they weren't afraid to die'. The paintings embody this affirmation of desire as they convey stark erotic presence, all the more so that the male pictured in a nude couple is Otero's father who posed regularly for his wife (fig. 101). One portrait in particular shows him with his chin languorously resting on his hand (fig. 102). The intimacy of the couple's relationship thus transpires in the paintings through Clotilde's erotic and tender gaze upon her husband. The conservationist who examines Clotilde's work also notes her predilection for the representation of female flesh and pubic hair, a landscape in its own right, as she puts it.



Fig. 101



Fig. 102

*Histoire d'un Secret* (Mariana Otero, 2003)

In Calle's work, sexuality is explicitly present across the numerous performances given the focus on her relationships. The title of *Double Blind* for its international

<sup>83</sup> Georges Bataille, *Eroticism, Death & Sensuality* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986), p. 11.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

release, *No Sex Last Night*, speaks for itself; although it rather denotes with great irony the couple's absence of sexual relations. This, however, is not a taboo subject between Sophie and Greg, as they talk freely about their desire or lack of it, and film each other naked once in their hotel room. Yet, these scenes point to the exhibition of their intimacy more than they reveal desire or an erotic gaze upon each other's body. More generally, throughout Calle's work, eroticism manifests itself rather in the fantasies ambiguously suggested, for instance in the dialectical articulation between pain and pleasure. If removed from the context of the installation, the expression 'exquisite pain' probably evokes as much orgasmic pleasure as medical symptoms, if not more. When she bluntly exhibits her naked body in *Le strip-tease (The Striptease)*, 1979) or when she performs her shadowing series (*Suite Vénitienne*, 1980; *La filature/The Detective*, 1981; *Vingt Ans Après*, 2001), she also stages fantasies of voyeurism and exhibitionism, which entail strong sexual and erotic connotations.<sup>85</sup> Calle also plays with erotic references attached to certain places and/or objects such as the hotel room (*Suite Vénitienne, L'Hôtel/The Hotel*, 1981), the bedroom, or the bed itself (*Les Dormeurs/The Sleepers*, 1979; *Voyage en Californie/Trip to California*, 2000; *Chambre avec Vue/Room with a View*, 2002, *Chambre à Coucher/Bedroom*, 2003). And yet, eroticism is recurrently undermined or counterbalanced by her pervading irony and humour, thus marking the distinction between Calle as a performer, and Calle as a woman.

As for Dieutre, the representation of the sexual and erotic body is necessarily envisaged from the angle of his affirmed, exposed, and expressed gayness, which constitutes a leading thread in his filmography. The stories of his past relationships and sexual encounters are sometimes told in extreme detail. At the same time, he regularly appears *cruising* for men in parks or squares, going to gay bars and clubs in which images of gay pornography unfold. This, once again, places the body at the centre, and as he claims:

The body is what remains when we have forgotten everything, and forgetting is what characterises our time. [...] Thus, we must start from the body, re-examine things again starting from this singularity, and singularity is, first of all, that of the body... And from this point on, re-read the whole world in bodily terms [*à cette aune-là d'un corps*]. It seems to be a possible form of ethical position for the artist today, I think.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>85</sup> See descriptions of the works, pp. 263-270.

<sup>86</sup> Pierre Chevalier and Simon Guibert (prods), 'Vincent Dieutre: Fragments', *op. cit.* (my translation).

As a result, the body, *his* body, is the starting point of his reassessment of the world around him, which also allows him to draw parallels between art and his contemporary environment. From his body will he thus situate himself, not only as an artist, but more generally in relation to art, and this also relies on the expression of his homosexuality. In *Leçons*, he juxtaposes Caravaggist representations of suffering (especially of the Passion) with the *mise en scène* of his own body, which suggests a (homo)erotic poetry in the baroque paintings (fig. 103). For Bersani and Dutoit, in fact, the religious motifs painted by Caravaggio also contain some degree of eroticism. Commenting on his *Calling of Saint Matthew* (1600, Chiesa San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome), they argue that the artist ‘proposes continuities between what we would ordinarily think of as vastly different categories of experience: the erotic come-on and Christ’s summoning his future disciple to follow him’.<sup>87</sup>



Fig. 103



Fig. 104

***Leçons de Ténèbres* (Vincent Dieutre, 2003)**

Hence, Caravaggio introduced humanity – in its most physiological and worldly aspects – into the religious motif. Here too, the contrast between suffering and pleasure, both located in the physicality of the body enhances the erotic charge, but it also emanates from the intrusive and insistent gaze of the camera’s close-ups on body parts in the paintings, and points to the erotic power of haptic visuality identified by Marks (fig. 104).<sup>88</sup> Like images stolen at a glance, these close-ups provide a fragmented representation of the body, thus evoking sensation more vividly.

<sup>87</sup> Leo Bersani & Ulysse Dutoit, *Caravaggio's Secrets*, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>88</sup> Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, op. cit., p. 185.

## THE SELF-INSRIPTION OF EMOTIONS AND SENSATIONS

Drawing on Deleuze, Bellour argues that to talk about emotion in cinema amounts to ‘simultaneously aiming at the intimate power of affect as a form, which is sensible to the body that feels it, and at the spiritual or mental consciousness that accompanies it more or less’.<sup>89</sup> Bellour’s point goes along those posited by Dubois and Schaeffer, whereby the inherent duality between concreteness and abstraction characterises emotions, the concept of the Figure, and, more generally, the body. In the corpus, the concrete aspect of this duality starts, of course, with the artists’ self-*inscription*.

For Dieutre, issues of affect, sensation, and the place of the body are clearly central throughout his work but appear perhaps most emblematically in *Leçons*. Beyond the melancholia that indisputably pervades his films, he is also interested in the sensory and physical effects of art upon the subject. With Caravaggism, in particular, mysticism and spirituality bring the body back to the fore, on the basis of the duality just mentioned. Whilst Calle also inflects the religious register in some of her performance-installations, her approach appears rather as the result of a taste for parody and pastiche, in keeping with the specificity of the exhibition spaces that she occupies. By contrast, Otero is not concerned with spirituality, so that her treatment of mourning takes on a more profane tone altogether. Like Dieutre, she also films paintings in a way that enhances the haptic quality of the image. The fact that hapticity is emphasised through painting does not contrast the materiality of the pictorial image with the abstractness of the filmic or photographic one, all the more so that the painting is also an *image*, precisely. On the contrary, the paintings constitute a relay for hapticity, which is then conveyed by the filmic device by way of close-ups or the use of light. For Otero, the emphasis on concrete and material aspects of the apparatus contributes to metaphorically bringing her mother’s body back to the surface, which is endowed with a therapeutic value. In this sense, the attention she pays to the texture of the canvas is comparable to the way in which Calle uses fabric for the panels of *Douleur Exquise*, which figures her work of mourning by *weaving away* the pain. In other words, many elements in this corpus work towards enhancing emotions in their most organic and sensory dimension.

If, for Dubois, the Figure is an abstract interface, here, the body functions as a sort of sensible interface. It is the *material of the figure*, to paraphrase Deleuze. In this sense,

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<sup>89</sup> Raymond Bellour, *Le Corps du Cinéma: Hypnoses, Émotions, Animalités* (Paris: POL, 2009), p. 140 (my translation).

the body is itself a medium that constitutes an instance of inscription for emotions and sensations. For Schaeffer, because of the way in which the body has been represented in Western European culture given its Christian roots (that is, as simultaneously image and real flesh), the body is also embedded in the duality between abstraction and concreteness that underpins this discussion. This is why it can equally be argued that ‘our understanding of the body is an understanding of the image, and our understanding of the image is an understanding of the body’.<sup>90</sup> The image is where the body comes to constitute itself and vice versa. And as Dieutre puts it, the body is the starting point from which the artist can reassess the world, hence the essential need for self-inscription.

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<sup>90</sup> Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *op. cit.*, p. 62

## CHAPTER 6. RITUALS

### RITUAL PATTERNS

This final chapter examines different patterns identified in the case studies, and which can be divided in three global categories: passage, repetition, and transformation. The central notion of passage has largely been developed throughout the previous chapters, in terms of in-betweenness and threshold in the specific contexts of identity, topography, temporality, and, last but not least, in relation to the very movement of the image. It will crop up once again, especially in terms of liminality, in connection with issues of transmission (for Otero and Dieutre in particular). While it is slightly farfetched to speak of *rites of passage* in the strict anthropological sense, certain situations are nonetheless loosely evocative of them. Passage also relates to the works' intermediality, that is, to the shift from one medial surface to another. The second pattern, repetition, manifests itself in various forms, ranging from re-enactment, mimesis, *mise en abyme*, to intertextuality, among which parody and pastiche. These latter forms could also be regarded as figures of play and apply most especially to Sophie Calle's work, in which humour and irony are paramount. The third pattern, transformation, cannot be separated from the second given the dialectical relation that binds them, as in a Moebius strip. Any iterative process is indeed, in essence, a transformative one, following the principle under which repetition begets difference. In this sense, figures of play pertain just as well to such transformative patterns, which also take the shape of deconstructions and the reassessment of gender.

Overall, these patterns entail a ritual dimension, *ritual* being understood here in the extended sense of repeated actions and, in some of the cases, ceremonial observance.<sup>1</sup> In *The Rites of Passage*, Arnold van Gennep emphasises indeed the iterative and sequential aspect of rites.<sup>2</sup> Besides, ritual also has to do with creativity and performance. In this sense, Victor Turner, who defines society as a process, as opposed to a static structure, posits that social relations entail a concrete and creative dimension.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Among its different definitions, the ritual is described as 'a ritual act or ceremonial observance. Also in later use: an action or series of actions regularly or habitually repeated' (*OED*).

<sup>2</sup> Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. by Monica B. Wizedom & Gabrielle L. Caffee (London: Routledge, [1909] 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*, *op. cit.*, p. vii.

Moreover, he speaks of the social world as a ‘world in becoming’<sup>4</sup> and points to the performative dimension of the ritual, which partakes of what he calls *social drama*.<sup>5</sup> As he points out, the word *performance* stems from the Old French *parfournir*, which means ‘to complete’ or ‘carry out thoroughly’,<sup>6</sup> while the word ‘process’ means ‘continuous action’ (*OED*). Resorting to Turner’s concept of the ‘fan of referents’, Richard Schechner relates performance to ritual, play, and art, whereby variations of the latter three compose a fan, which is articulated with the paradigm of performance.<sup>7</sup> Performance, which consists in *acting out*, puts the emphasis on action as well as on the dynamic and creative character of social relations.

To come back to the case studies, the combined notions of ritual and performance (the paradigm, to paraphrase Schechner) thus provide the overarching theme or leading thread to this chapter and are articulated with the three patterns described above – passage, repetition, and transformation (the fan). Overall, the different points discussed here are deeply interconnected and may sometimes overlap. Furthermore, the patterns of passage, repetition, and transformation, which can perhaps be considered in a circular configuration, apply as much to the process of self-representation as to the cinematic apparatus. Passage harks back to the very physical movement of the film strip running through the projector while the dialectical relation between repetition and transformation may well evoke, among other elements, the incremental changes characterising the succession of the images, especially as far as the analogue format is concerned. Finally, Schechner refers to rites of passage as a ‘changing status’.<sup>8</sup> This issue in the context of individuals within social groups provides an interesting comparison with the changing status of cinema given the current technological shifts. In other words, to what extent do artists, who take their own persona and body as film matter, use such issues to reflect upon cinema’s own rite of passage?

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<sup>4</sup> Victor Turner, ‘Social Dramas and Ritual Metaphors’, in *Ritual, Play, and Performance: Readings in the Social Sciences/Theatre*, ed. by Richard Schechner & Mady Schuman (New York: Continuum Books, 1976), pp. 97-120 (p. 98).

<sup>5</sup> *Idem*, pp. 103-106. See also Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ, [1982] 1992), p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Schechner (ed.), ‘Introduction: the Fan and the Web’, in *Ritual, Play, and Performance*, *op. cit.*, pp. xv-xvi.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*, p. xvi.

### PASSAGE... OR LIMINALITY

Victor Turner coined the term liminality in reference to the second of the three stages identified by van Gennep in rites of passage.<sup>9</sup> It stems from the Latin *limen*, which means threshold and corresponds to a period in which the subjects, also described as threshold people, are assimilated to passengers as they pass ‘through a cultural realm that has few or none of the characteristics of the past or coming state’.<sup>10</sup> Their position is ambiguous because ‘liminal entities are neither here nor there’.<sup>11</sup> Liminality is also often associated with death and is seen as the end of one ‘state’ before entering a new one.<sup>12</sup> Finally, Turner explains that the ‘set of transitional qualities “betwixt and between” defined states of culture and society has become itself an institutionalized state’ in modern societies and that, to a certain extent, transition has become a permanent condition.<sup>13</sup> This not only resonates with Adorno’s definition of the essay, and would explain the growing interest for this form, but a film-maker like Vincent Dieutre certainly embodies this condition of permanent in-betweenness also epitomised by the properties of the moving image. Liminality is thus considered in an extended sense here and provides a good starting point to examine the works’ intermediality. After all, as Lars Elleström puts it, ‘medium means ‘middle’, ‘interval’, interspace’, and so on.’<sup>14</sup> The following discussion on intermediality ties in with the reflection initiated in the previous chapter about the sensible, surface, and bodily experience.

#### *INTERMEDIALITY: AN OVERVIEW*

Before analysing the intermedial dimension of the case studies, it will be useful to give a brief overview of this concept, which, as such, emerged mainly among German

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<sup>9</sup> The transitional stage, which corresponds to ‘liminal (or threshold) rites’, the first and the third stages being, respectively, those of separation and incorporation. Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*, p. 95.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*, p. 100.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*, p. 107.

<sup>14</sup> Lars Elleström (ed.), ‘The Modalities of Media: A Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations’, in *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2010), pp. 11-48 (p. 13).

speaking scholars in the late 1980s.<sup>15</sup> To put it concisely, intermediality refers to the ‘integration of aesthetic concepts from distinct media within a new medial context.’<sup>16</sup> It is more than the mere sum of different media. While the recent ground-breaking technological shifts (namely from analogue to digital) have contributed to its increased visibility in the last two decades,<sup>17</sup> it is obvious that the interest, not to say obsession for the question of the medium among the global community of researchers and practitioners in the fields of art, film, and media predates the emergence of this concept. However, the specificity of intermediality is that it looks at all media in their interconnections with each other; that is to say, not only film, video, and television, but also radio, painting, music, books, live and theatrical performance, and so forth. Given the broad definition of the term medium,<sup>18</sup> this assertion must nevertheless be toned down, for intermediality is essentially concerned with aesthetic media and art forms (including mass media), rather than with media in a wider sense. One may argue that, as far as cinema is concerned, media such as photography, theatre, or writing are intrinsically linked to it, but in Ágnes Pethő’s opinion,

it is the theory of intermediality that has brought into the spotlight the intricate interactions of different media manifest in the cinema, emphasizing the way in which the moving pictures can incorporate forms of all other media and can initiate fusions and ‘dialogues’ between the distinct arts.<sup>19</sup>

Historically, intermediality takes the word ‘intermedia’ as its point of departure, yet only to better distinguish itself from it. When Fluxus artist Dick Higgins borrowed the term in 1966 from Samuel T. Coleridge, he called for a *decompartmentalisation* of art and to describe a form of artwork that ‘seems to fall between media’, such as Marcel

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<sup>15</sup> See, among others, Jürgen E. Müller, ‘Intermedialität und Medienhistoriographie’, in *Intermedialität Analog/Digital*, ed. by Joachim Paech & Jens Schröter (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2008), pp. 31-46 (p. 31). Research on intermediality was also developed in Canada. Irina O. Rajewsky mentions the creation in 1997 of a research centre on intermediality at the University de Montreal; see ‘Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality’, *Intermedialités/Intermedialities: Remédier/Remediation*, 6 (Autumn, 2006), 43-64. This journal was created in 2003 in the same university, and as its title suggests, it is entirely devoted to the concept. See in particular the first issue: *Naître*, 1 (Spring, 2003). Finally, this research was also taken up in some Scandinavian and Eastern European countries, as the list of contributors to the book edited by Lars Elleström illustrates (*Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, *op. cit.*).

<sup>16</sup> Jürgen E. Müller, ‘Intermedialität und Medienwissenschaft: Thesen zum State of the Art’, *Montage A/V*, 3: 2 (1994), 119-138, p. 133.

<sup>17</sup> Jürgen E. Müller, ‘Intermedialität als poetologisches und medientheoretisches Konzept’, in *Intermedialität: Theorie und Praxis eines interdisziplinären Forschungsgebiets*, ed. by Jörg Helbig (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1998), pp. 31-40 (p. 32).

<sup>18</sup> In ‘The Modalities of Media’, *op. cit.*, Lars Elleström provides a fairly standard definition: ‘a medium is a channel for the mediation of information and entertainment [...]’ (p. 13).

<sup>19</sup> Ágnes Pethő, *Cinema and Intermediality: The Passion for the In-Between* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), p. 1.

Duchamp's ready-mades or happenings.<sup>20</sup> While different from the idea of medial fusion advocated by Higgins, intermediality consists in the same vein in breaking the 'splendid isolation' in which humanities have been trapped. More precisely, it is a theoretical as much as a methodological concept that advocates a rupture with traditional representations of media as isolated monads; therefore, it is not a rigid or static framework but favours, on the contrary, fluid interconnections.<sup>21</sup>

With this as a backdrop, the aim is to discuss the ways in which the aesthetics of the case studies rely on medial interactions. Furthermore, the sense of transition and in-betweenness pervading these works also applies to the artists' use of the medium, and this includes their own body, itself a medium, which is fully implicated at the cross section between media.<sup>22</sup>

#### *THE INTERMEDIAL BODY (OF THE ARTIST)*

In both Otero's *Histoire* and Dieutre's *Leçons*, the body contributes to establishing a set of intermedial relations, which take place between pictorial and moving images, by way of correspondence, or *mise en abyme*, between the film-makers' body on screen and those on the canvases. In Dieutre's case, his conscious and even deliberate striving for physical resemblance between the protagonists and the Caravaggiesque (predominantly male) figures reinforces this reflexive process.<sup>23</sup> However, Dieutre's approach also partakes of a broader reflection on the relationship between art and film, so that in *Leçons* and *Mon Voyage*, bodily experience becomes an alternative way of documenting and reflecting upon art, as opposed to more conventional forms of art documentary. This is in keeping with his belief that the body is the starting point to reassess the world, as discussed in the previous chapter, and he pursues:

The body lies precisely inside a world in which discourses and thought are increasingly ungraspable, atomised, liquefied. The body is a good landmark

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<sup>20</sup> Higgins, however, talked more specifically about the space between 'art media and life media.' Dick Higgins, 'Intermedia', *The Something Else Newsletter*, 1: 1 (February, 1966), p. 1. For Samuel T. Coleridge's 1812 essay, see Thomas M. Raysor, ed., quoted in *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism* (London: Constable, 1936), p. 33.

<sup>21</sup> Jürgen E. Müller, 'Intermedialität als poetologisches und medientheoretisches Konzept', *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>22</sup> This ties in with Higgins's conception of intermedia as something between 'art media' and 'life media', or with the situationist movement who also advocated the blurring between art and life.

<sup>23</sup> See in this respect Laura Rascaroli's description of the similar process of *mise en abyme* in Michelangelo Antonioni's *Lo Sguardo di Michelangelo* (*The Gaze of Michelangelo*, Italy, 2004), in *The Personal Camera*, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

for everything that we could say, and is thus effective. [...] [T]he effect that music, a beautiful painting, or a work of art in general can have on me is conveyed by the body... precisely because the systems of thought, of analysis, of evaluation of art seem a little outdated, a little tired, so to speak.<sup>24</sup>

As vague as his idea of outdated systems of thought may seem, the point is that, for him, the body is a conduit for an emotional, sensory, and singular response to art. And in so doing, he places the artist's body at the core of the discussion on intermediality. The same can be argued about the way in which he films music, in *Mon Voyage*, which is particularly interesting since music tends to be perceived as abstract, but, as Dieutre points out, music is not only to be heard but also to be seen, hence the extra-diegetic scenes of the musicians in the recording studio, during which the camera focuses now and then on the hands of the cellist, the back of the pianist, the face of the singer, and so forth (figs 105-106).<sup>25</sup>



**Fig. 105**



**Fig. 106**

***Mon Voyage d'Hiver* (Vincent Dieutre, 2003)**

As these close-ups on their body parts bring heightened attention to their performance and movements, the music does not only become visible but is *embodied* through the physical presence of the musicians. The materiality of the music is also enhanced by the quality of the instrument used here, a pianoforte, known for its contrasted sound, and which Dieutre describes as 'slightly rough and difficult'.<sup>26</sup> Just as in *Leçons*, the connection between music and film is achieved through a parallel between the bodies of the musicians and that of Vincent, also present in these sequences. The bodies all act as

<sup>24</sup> Pierre Chevalier and Simon Guibert (prods), 'Vincent Dieutre: Fragments', *op. cit.* (my translation).

<sup>25</sup> To some extent, this places Dieutre again in the lineage of the Fluxus movement and, before this, of John Cage for whom music was to be performed live and not merely recorded.

<sup>26</sup> Vincent Dieutre, 'Entretien de Vincent Dieutre avec François Bonenfant autour de *Mon Voyage d'Hiver*', *op. cit.*

intermedial relays between the music and the moving image, while also working towards haptic *visuality*, as already mentioned.

In Otero's film, the body plays a similar role in bridging media, namely painting and film, by way of a dialogue between the film-maker's body and her mother's predominantly female nudes. The metaphoric function of the paintings has already been expounded: they function as an anchorage of Mariana's missing memory of her mother, especially as the female nudes tend to be associated with Clotilde's own body, and yet, the element that perhaps stresses more significantly the intermedial relation between painting and film is the comparable trajectory of Clotilde and Mariana as respectively painter and film-maker, because the latter's sense of connection to the former takes place on this common artistic ground, that is, more than in terms of a mother to daughter relationship. Thus, intermediality is manifested in a first instance through the connection between the nudes, which metaphorically point to Clotilde's own body, and Mariana's physical presence in the film. In a second instance, this dialogue becomes one between artists' bodies.

In a different way, Sophie Calle creates intermedial connections thanks to the human body, albeit not necessarily her own for she interacts with various participants or the audience. For example, in her retrospective at the Centre Pompidou (2003), she used the museum attendants as relays of her own medial role. The exhibition's title, *M'as-Tu Vue* literally means *did you see me?*, but in a figurative and substantive use, it also designates ostentatious behaviour, so that this title sounded like an injunction for the visitors to unleash their scopophilic instinct towards the artist. As they reached the exit, however, they could read that Calle had possibly been wandering throughout the museum, and that, in her absence, the attendants had perhaps been observing the public's demeanour on her behalf. When art critic Nicholas Cullinan visited the exhibition, he apparently caught sight of the artist, which disconcerted him enough to wonder 'who was the observer and the observed in this transaction.'<sup>27</sup> For Marcel Duchamp, the artist is a sort of medium who links the work of art with the audience, which aptly defines the way in which Calle establishes a direct relation with the public by way of this hide-and-see game.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, through these interactions, she does not merely mediate between art and the audience, but integrates this mediality within

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<sup>27</sup> Nicholas Cullinan, 'Reviews: Sophie Calle *M'as-Tu Vue?*', *Contemporary Magazine*, 60 (2004), <[http://www.contemporary-magazines.com/reviews60\\_1.htm](http://www.contemporary-magazines.com/reviews60_1.htm)> [accessed: 15 May 2015].

<sup>28</sup> Marcel Duchamp, *Ingénieur du Temps Perdu: Entretiens avec Pierre Cabanne* (Paris: Pierre Belfond, [1967] 1977), p. 122.

the work of art between, in *The Detachment* for example, the East Berliners she interviews, on the one hand, and missing objects or the effacement of their memory, on the other. Conversely, in *Ghosts*, *Last Seen*, *The Detachment*, *Douleur Exquise*, and *Prenez Soin de Vous*, the narratives or testimonies of other people provide a form of mediation between herself and art works, objects, her pain, or anything having a connection to absence. As a result, she simultaneously materialises her loss through her interactions with the other and fills the gap with people's narratives and memories, while this process also provides a *mise en abyme* of the *mediator's* role.

#### INTERMEDIAL MISE EN ABYME

As originally planned in the screenplay of Otero's film, the diegesis was structured around the film-maker's visits to the relatives and friends who owned some of Clotilde's paintings, which Mariana was to collect in preparation for the exhibition. This would give her opportunity to evoke memories of Clotilde with them. Although, this plot eventually became a lot more implicit in the final result, the paintings also have a concrete purpose as a narrative leading thread, in this sense. In addition, the film is punctuated by sequences in which the paintings are examined and discussed in detail, not only by the conservationist but also by family and friends. Pethő's resort to *ekphrasis* comes very appropriately here. For her, a film is ekphrastic when the

embedded art form [... is] manifest as a medium that is different from that of the cinematic image in which it is embedded. In short, an ekphrasis requires the perception of intermedial relations, as 'transformative inscriptions' or 'figurations' of mediality in a work.<sup>29</sup>

She also speaks of intermedial *mise en abyme*, whereby 'one medium becomes the mirror of the other in some other way'.<sup>30</sup> This accurately defines the presence of Clotilde's paintings in Otero's film (fig. 107), of baroque paintings and sculptures in *Leçons*, or of Schubert's music in *Mon Voyage*. In *Histoire*, the aesthetic implications of intermediality are intertwined with narrative elements on a personal and emotional level. Thus, Mariana's endeavour to remember her mother or understand who she was by trying to grasp her painting also enables her to indirectly comment upon her own status as a film-maker, by a process of *mise en abyme* of Clotilde's artistic experience,

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<sup>29</sup> Ágnes Pethő, 'Media in the Cinematic Imagination: Ekphrasis and the Poetics of the In-Between in Jean-Luc Godard's Cinema', in *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, *op. cit.*, pp. 211-222 (p. 213).

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*, p. 214.

precisely. By extension, it also allows her to reflect upon the relationship between the pictorial and the moving image because to film the paintings ultimately harks back to the possibilities of the cinematic medium; for instance, questions such as how to cinematically render the texture of the painting bring forward issues of surface and hapticity as demonstrated in Chapter 5. Throughout the film, Otero also sets a dialogue between the landscape, often filmed in lateral *driving* shots, and her mother's works (figs 108-109).



Fig. 107:



Fig. 108



Fig. 109

*Histoire d'un Secret* (Mariana Otero, 2003)

Similarly, Diestre's examination of baroque art simultaneously partakes of a documentary interest for Caravaggism and allows him to explore the filmic medium, while in *Mon Voyage*, he takes up the characteristic musical structure of the counterpoint to weave the images together with a complex soundtrack, thus creating multiple temporal spaces and levels of narration. As a result, the reflection upon the cinematic apparatus takes place in the very passage between the different art forms and media used.

In *Leçons* in particular, this prompts a further and complex set of combinations and Eivind Røsaak's transposition of Tom Gunning's cinema of attractions to digital technologies shall be useful to describe what is at play. In early cinema, sensation is

related to the medium, in particular to the passage from stillness to motion.<sup>31</sup> For Røsaak, this means that the space between stillness and movement is

an emotional space [...] where the audience is transported from the familiar to the unfamiliar, from the canny, to the uncanny. The emotions are specifically linked to the appearance of motion, which transforms the emotion into a state of shock.<sup>32</sup>

As he examines the time slice effect in *The Matrix* (Andy & Lana Wachowski, US, 1999), Røsaak argues that, just as in early cinema, sensation is related to the medium and to the contrast between stillness and motion, but new technologies have reversed the process so that the emotional shock, while it still arises in the in-between, emerges this time in the passage from motion to stillness, used as we are today to movement and speed.<sup>33</sup> Gilles Deleuze had made a similar connection between sensation and in-betweenness in his discussion of Francis Bacon's painting (although here, sensation lies in-between figurative representation and abstraction).<sup>34</sup>

Something of that order takes place in *Leçons* as Dieutre intertwines the properties of painting and cinema to create figures of sensation. With respect to rhythm, the stillness of painting is reflected against the intrinsic qualities of the cinematic medium, which gives way to different sets of (to and fro) passages between still pictorial and moving film images. However, the latter can be divided further in two categories: 'self-moving images',<sup>35</sup> whereby movement takes place within the image while the frame is static (fig. 110); and dynamic frames, whereby movement also originates from the camera's own movements (fig. 111), which is either handheld or operates tracking shots. These different types of image should not be considered in oppositional but rather in transitional terms, that is, in the shift from one quality to another. Because they tend to focus on empty urban settings, the self-moving images play with the illusion of stillness, which is only interrupted from time to time by a car, a bicycle, or a passer-by crossing the frame. This is also the case of the slow panoramic

<sup>31</sup> Tom Gunning, 'The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, its Spectator and the Avant-Garde', *Wide Angle*, 8: 3/4 (Fall, 1986), 63-70.

<sup>32</sup> Eivind Røsaak, 'Figures of Sensation: Between Still and Moving Images', in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. by Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), pp. 321-336 (p. 322).

<sup>33</sup> Røsaak analyses the fighting sequence in which the female character, Trinity, jumps and appears floating in the air, as if frozen, before striking back; *id.*, pp. 324-325.

<sup>34</sup> In fact, Deleuze attributes this idea to Bacon himself who speaks of sensation as – among other things – the passage 'from one "order" to another, from one "level" to another, from one "area" to another'. *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, *op.cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>35</sup> The expression is borrowed from Pasi Väliäho, *Mapping the Moving Image: Gesture, Thought, and Cinema circa 1900* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), p. 18.

sequences, as if the stillness of paintings had contaminated the static frames and panoramic sequences, which thus look like cinematic tableaux. As a result, figures of sensation emerge as our gaze is caught upon movement held in suspension to reveal the full screen shot of a painting, the static frame of a wall, an empty backstreet, or the slow panoramic view of a city at night. These delayed moments of contemplation, to paraphrase Laura Mulvey, of pictorial images or living tableaux create sensation by breaking the flow of the rapid, handheld camera movements.<sup>36</sup>



Fig. 110



Fig. 111

***Leçons de Ténèbres* (Vincent Dieutre, 2003)**

In this film, in a sense, Bellour's pensive and Mulvey's possessive spectators have given way to a bewildered – and perhaps even possessed – one, so that the uncanny or sensation effect does not only arise in the passage between stillness and motion (within the filmic image and from painting to film), but is also related to surface and texture, both enhanced by the presence of painting. These two dimensions – motion versus immobility, on the one hand, texture, on the other – are woven together so that sensation arises in the intermedial *mise en abyme* of the different pictorial properties. The surface of painting opens up the way to aesthetic explorations within the filmic image in terms of grain and texture, something that Dieutre achieves by alternating film formats and media. In *Leçons*, the chiaroscuro sequences evoke the qualities of painting thanks to the lighting used, which specifically harks back to Caravaggism, and because they are shot on Super 8: this format confers on the images a distinctive rough grain that emulates the canvas texture and patina of age characteristic of the 17<sup>th</sup> century

<sup>36</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Death 24 x Times a Second*, *op. cit.* See in particular 'Chapter eight: Delaying Cinema', pp. 144-160. Her point about the ways in which new technologies have redefined our modes of viewing is particularly pertinent here: in *Leçons de Ténèbres*, the contrast between the flowing of the moving images and the pauses on the paintings and other 'picturesque' shots becomes particularly obvious in fast forward mode.

paintings. In these sequences, the pictorial dimension thus has to do with texture as well, so that the images' haptic quality is not only obtained through *chiaroscuro* lighting, close-ups, and mobile camera, as already discussed, but is reinforced quite literally by the materiality of the filmstrip, all the more so that amateur format is recurrently associated with handicraft and connotations of tactility. Against this backdrop, it may seem paradoxical to relate the properties of painting with the *photogénie* of the static and panoramic sequences shot on 35 mm, which were used to create a proper cinematic shot. Yet, in this case, the parallel with painting relies not on hapticity, but on the composition of the images and stability of the frame, that is to say, rhythm: the images' slow pace induces contemplation, therefore duration, therefore an illusion of stillness and eternity, somehow like painting. Such examples illustrate the way in which Dieutre deconstructs the cinematic process by going back and forth between painting and film to play with different aesthetic dimensions.

#### *INTERMEDIALITY: THE CASE OF SOPHIE CALLE*

The work of Sophie Calle raises interesting yet tricky questions with regard to multimodality, multimediality, and intermediality.<sup>37</sup> It is intrinsically multimodal, and multimedial given its combination of live performance, photography, writing, book publications, video, with a great variety of found or personal objects integrated in her installations. It is also intermedial because Calle's artistic creativity emerges precisely at the crossroads between these media. Furthermore, the exploitation of her personal life as her main subject matter (irrespective of the events' truthfulness), thus mixing up art and life, brings her all the closer to conceptions such as Alan Kaprow's total art or Dick Higgins's intermedia.<sup>38</sup> The ways in which intermediality crops up in Calle's work is an extremely vast subject but the focus shall be narrowed down to the ways in which her installations and performances feed the specific reflection carried out on the moving image.<sup>39</sup> In this sense, the dynamics that pervades her approach is paramount.

In addition, her constant balance between one medium and another denotes a

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<sup>37</sup> The differences between these terms will not be developed here but in short, multimodality refers to the combined use of different modes (such as film, which may combine image, sound, and text), while multimediality designates the combined use of different media. For a discussion on the interconnections between these research fields, see Elleström, 'The Modalities of Media', *op. cit.*, pp. 12-14.

<sup>38</sup> Alan Kaprow, 'Notes on the Creation of a Total Art' [1958], in *Alan Kaprow. Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. by Jeff Kelley (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, [1993] 2003), pp. 10-12.

<sup>39</sup> The Canadian journal *Intermédialités/Intermedialities* dedicated a whole issue to Calle's work in this context: *Intermédialités/Intermedialities: filer (Sophie Calle)*, *op. cit.*

refusal of fixed media borders. Maïté Snauwaert and Bertrand Gervais rightly observe that, through the multiple forms of mediation of her performances, ‘each possible heritage of Sophie Calle is thus revisited, inflected, re-woven in its own way.’<sup>40</sup> It is in this sense a permanent work in progress whose dynamic pattern is all the more stressed that it takes place in terms of intermedial shifts. Calle introduces slight variations in the different versions of her works as they shift from one medium to another, or between the different versions of a similar work, as in *Rachel, Monique*, to name but one. For Cécile Camart, ‘this type of microvariations is a characteristic method of the artist who brings the image into question.’<sup>41</sup> Calle thereby prevents the viewer from believing in the fixed and definitive status of her work. Hence the recurrent themes of reversibility and double game, which are also related to intermediality as they point to the oscillation between one level, or one surface, and another. The following examples illustrate some of the ways in which the artist tackles the notion of medium and mediality, which includes a recurrent play with the multiple levels of language.

In *Où et Quand? Berck* (*Where and When? Berck*, 2005) she travels to a small town called Berck on the French Northern coast, on the instructions of a clairvoyant who uses tarot cards.<sup>42</sup> Intentionally or not, Calle’s play with the medium begins with at a linguistic level, as if she were trying to exhaust all possible meanings, for ‘medium’ also designates ‘a person believed [...] to communicate between the living and the dead. Hence: a clairvoyant [...]’ (*OED*). As a book format, the work consists of three parts: a flip-book, the narrative of Calle’s trip to Berck, and a video. The flip-book takes up the first two thirds of the volume and is composed of a succession of photographs, on the top right corner of the page, of a woman sitting at a table, her hands laid on a pack of tarot cards (fig. 112). As the reader flips through the pages, she appears shuffling the cards and spreading them on the table. As an object, play cards are particularly suited for this flickering game. The flip-book is followed by the book title and the front matter, which introduce the story of Calle’s trip to Berck, in which the artist alternates photographs and text. In the middle appear six pages in translucent paper transcribing Calle’s random encounter with an elderly woman. Lastly, the book also contains the

<sup>40</sup> Maïté Snauwaert & Bertrand Gervais, ‘Présentation: “Au Fil des Œuvres”’, *Intermédialités/Intermedialities: Filer (Sophie Calle)*, op. cit., 7-16, p.13 (my translation).

<sup>41</sup> Cécile Camart, ‘L’Abdication Devant l’Image? Figures du Manque, de la Disparition et du Deuil dans les Œuvres Récentes de Sophie Calle’, *Intermédialités/Intermedialities – filer (Sophie Calle)*, op. cit., 49-66, p. 65 (my translation).

<sup>42</sup> This was the first performance in which Calle followed the instructions of a medium, before repeating the experience, which eventually led her to Lourdes, as discussed in Chapter 5. As always, Calle adapted her performance to a book: *Où et Quand? Berck* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2008).

DVD of a five-minute long video entitled *Mémé (Grandma)* in which Calle is walking along the sea with the woman. Because she is holding the camera, the viewer only sees her shadow projected on the ground, while her voice over, as the voice of the narrator, is intertwined with the diegetic dialogue (fig. 113).



Fig. 112



Fig. 113

***Où et Quand? Berk* (Sophie Calle, 2005)**

The vast range of publications about the artist by art critics, art historians, or even literary scholars tends to put the emphasis on her work as a photographer and a writer; and indeed, Calle is widely described as a *narrative artist*.<sup>43</sup> Yet, her assembling of images and text also tends to evoke cinematic narrative structures, and in this particular case, the simultaneous presence of the flip-book, the alternation of text and photographs, and the reader's gesture as s/he turns the pages cannot but evoke the flickering of the projector. Moreover, the flip-book stands as pre-history, that of the plot, as the story's preamble (like a teaser perhaps), and that of cinema, as a very old technique, just as Calle's shadow projected onto the floor in the video evokes shadow play. To some extent, the passage between the flip-book and the second section (the narrative) also echoes the shift from a cinema of attractions to narrative cinema. In addition to this historical perspective, *Où et Quand? Berk* contains all the components for a cinematic experience: images, movement (through the flip-book and the video), and a plot, including ludic references to narrative tension in that Calle's trajectory relies on the randomness of a pack of tarot cards. While this performance entails a certain cinematic dimension, this structure is revealed through the decomposition of movement as the elements are used separately and reassembled into a new fragmentary narrative form. The resulting work evokes a dissected history of the moving image. Thus, and

<sup>43</sup> Christine Macel, 'La Question de l'Auteur dans l'Œuvre de Sophie Calle', in *M'as-Tu Vue?*, exhibition catalogue, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-28 (p. 21).

although, arguably, the book simply constitutes the creative conversion of a multimedia installation into a readable, watchable, and palpable format, this transformative gesture also condenses the historical evolution of the image in movement: from the flip-book to digital video.

In *Ghosts* and *Last Seen*, it is globally the space of the museum that provides interesting intermedial connections as the missing paintings, replaced by the staff's memories, take the shape of drawn and verbal descriptions. Beyond the issues of absence and memory already examined in Chapter 4, these works also create passages between painting, language, and ultimately writing, something that the pun on the multiple meanings of the word *fantôme* (which, as a reminder, also designates the object replacing a book on a library shelf) emphasises. By introducing the vocabulary of the library into the art gallery, Calle invites verbal language into the pictorial image, thus enhancing its narrative dimension, in a way that echoes Rancière's concept of the distribution of the sensible, as we shall see below. Moreover, to paraphrase Cécile Camart, in these performances, she literally brings the (missing) images into question thanks to the museum's staff.

To come back to Calle's retrospective, *M'as-Tu Vue*, her virtual presence, that is, the fact that she may have been there, and the role played by the attendants in her absence set up a *dispositif* of virtual surveillance comparable to Bentham's panopticon, whose architectural structure was designed to 'induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power', as Michel Foucault argues.<sup>44</sup> In other words, the inmates feel under constant watch even if the latter is only virtual. While these issues will not be developed here, Calle's exhibition raises an interesting question in the present context because it brings together the psychological structure of Bentham's strategy of ubiquitous surveillance and the gallery space, which is thus reinterpreted as a panopticon; to some extent, this also resonates with Krauss's understanding of a psychological condition, such as narcissism, as a medium. In any case, *M'as-Tu Vue* establishes an intermedial connection between artistic and coercive architectural spaces via the *dispositif* of the surveillance. Moreover, without a camera, Calle creates a virtual surveillance device in which her body – her gaze, more precisely – and that of the attendants become the apparatus. The latter ultimately thus become the artist's virtual camera, her prosthetic surveillance device, as

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<sup>44</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (New York: Vintage Books, [1975] 1995), p. 201.

it were.

These examples in Calle's work generally point to a blurring of the medium's role while paradoxically using it in very distinct ways. This is exactly one of the issues at stake in intermediality, which plays on the fine balance between mixed media and the crossing of media borders. In fact, the main criticism against this concept is that it tends to focus on media borders and ignore the increasing dissolution of the boundaries between different media and art forms: intermediality purportedly ignores that all media are mixed media.<sup>45</sup> Yet, for Ágnes Pethő, the prefix 'inter' is the key element of the concept because it focuses on 'relationships, rather than structures, on something that "happens" in-between media rather than simply exists within a given signification'; and in line with this, Lars Elleström speaks of the dynamics of border crossing as a form of performance.<sup>46</sup> This brings together the issues of in-betweenness as a dynamic relation, as performance, and thus as experience. Moreover, it ultimately harks back to the performative dimension of the ritual evoked at the beginning of this chapter: intermediality points to passage and liminality. The ambiguity maintained between blurring and deconstructing media in Calle's exhibition *M'as-Tu Vue?*, in *Ghosts, Last Seen*, or *Où et Quand? Berck*, to name a few, embodies this theoretical issue by emphasising the node in-between the terms of the relation. Ironically, the penultimate image of *Où et Quand? Berck* shows a road whose continuous white line leads to the water, as if the road dissolved into the sea or, conversely, as if the sea receded from the land (fig. 114).



**Fig. 114: *Où et Quand? Berck* (Sophie Calle, 2005)**

<sup>45</sup> Irina P. Rajewsky, 'Border Talks: The Problematic Status of Media Borders in the Current Debate about Intermediality', in *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, *op. cit.*, 51-68, p. 52.

<sup>46</sup> Ágnes Pethő, *Cinema and Intermediality*, *op. cit.*, p. 1; Lars Elleström, 'The Modalities of Media: A Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations', *op. cit.*, p. 28.

This is an apt metaphor of the dissolution of the (moving) image as we have known it; but perhaps more simply, in the context of Calle's oscillations between performance, photography, writing, and video, it illustrates the intermedial ambivalence of the image.

#### RITES OF PASSAGE

If intermediality points to liminality in a specific sense, other elements in the case studies evoke rites of passage in a literal way, in keeping with issues of transmission discussed in the previous chapters, especially in relation to Dieutre's *Mon Voyage*. In this film, the structure of the journey epitomises van Gennep's three stages in the rites of passage: the departure from Paris as a phase of separation; the trip itself as the liminal phase; and the arrival in Berlin, where Itvan reunites with his mother, as the phase of incorporation wherein the subject is reintegrated into his community. Although the narrative is not an archetypal road movie or *Bildungsroman*, *Mon Voyage* could be envisaged as a ritual passage into adulthood for the teenage boy who travels from Paris to Berlin without his parents, especially as Vincent is not a reliable father figure. The latter even expresses his doubts as to his capacity to take care of Itvan: 'I thought I was the last person with whom to entrust a child. Up to now, I was the child'. This means that the trip acquires a formative value perhaps even more for Vincent, as though he were an adult in becoming, now that he has accepted the responsibility of looking after the boy. The film also marks a shift within Dieutre's filmography: whereas *Rome Désolée* and *Bologna Centrale* dealt with Vincent's youth and drug addiction during his Italian period, and *Leçons* with resurrection, *Mon Voyage* is a film about growing maturity and death, epitomised by the winter season.

In this film, rites of passage also hark back to the transition affecting the medium. More precisely, the rites of passage experienced on a human and personal level serve as a mirror for the broader reflection upon the current shifts within visual media (from analogue to digital technology), and both levels are woven together in the film's narrative and aesthetics. Dieutre does not favour one medium to the detriment of another but, instead, makes a dialectical use of the technologies at hand according to the financial and thus technical constraints he was subjected to, while showing full awareness of the fact that times are changing drastically and evermore rapidly.<sup>47</sup> In this transitional process, the significance of each format also experiences important shifts in

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<sup>47</sup> Vincent Dieutre, 'Entretien de Vincent Dieutre avec François Bonenfant autour de *Mon Voyage d'Hiver*', *op. cit.*

terms of status, and the case of 16 mm film is particularly illustrative.<sup>48</sup> This might suggest that the present moment is poised on a threshold between the era of film and the era of the digital in which the so-called old technologies may still co-exist with the new and interact creatively with them, but for how long? In 2009, Kodak announced the end of its 16 mm film stock production. Against the backdrop of the ongoing apocalyptic discourse declaring the death of cinema, it is certainly tempting to understand *Mon Voyage* along such claims. However, the film goes beyond this interpretation and undermines the idea of an ontological nature of film, media, and specific formats, insofar as technologies make sense according to historical contingencies, and in a dialectical relation to one another. This ties in with Jacques Rancière's definition of the aesthetic regime, which, against the spread of messages about the death of the image and of what he calls a 'deliberation on mourning', harks back to the 'sensible mode of being properly specific to artistic products.'<sup>49</sup> As a result, Diestre's combination of the different technologies is perhaps less an outburst of nostalgia than a creative exploitation of the current tools available to today's film-makers.

If a pervasive feeling of melancholia nonetheless persists, it is perhaps more related to the film-maker's concerns about the changes and transitions occurring in the places he visits, and the same could be argued about his other films. In *Mon Voyage*, as the journey progresses into the former Eastern Germany, evocations of the countries historical past give way to more recent events, such as the effects of the reunification, described in Germany as *the turn (die Wende)*. Thus, *transition* is also historical and political. In Dresden, Vincent meets his old friend Werner, who spent time in jail for his involvement in radical left wing activism. As they wander in the city, the camera operates a 360° rotation at a quiet crossroads, while Vincent laments that cities are changing too fast, Werner feels betrayed. The latter thus embodies a sense of loss and the rejection of the new face of Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall. This said, Vincent's discourse goes beyond simplistic nostalgia, as he explains to Itvan: 'Don't think that everything was better before. [...] I just would like you to understand that it

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<sup>48</sup> Having shifted from amateur to professional format at the outbreak of WWII, before being dismissed again by professionals as substandard technology, it eventually became the preferred format of documentary and avant-garde film-makers by the 1950s. And at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, it experienced a revival among certain Hollywood film-makers. See Brian Winston, *Technologies of Seeing, Photography, Cinematography and Television* (London: British Film Institute, 1996), pp. 58–87; Jan-Kristopher Horak, 'Archiving, Preserving, Screening 16 mm', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 45, n. 3 (2006), 112–118.

<sup>49</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. by Gabriel Rockhill. (London: Continuum Books, 2004), respectively, p. 9 and p. 22.

was possible to live here, in this city, split in two, sliced with a razor blade [...] The cranes will soon have finished their job and it's perhaps for the best [...]'. As a result, *Mon Voyage* subtly intertwines different manifestations of transition expressed in personal, technical, and historical terms. As he sets his disillusioned gaze upon the country in the process of reconstruction, Vincent comes across as a man from another era, as he explains in his farewell address to the teenager, before his silhouette is swallowed into a past image of the Berlin Wall: 'Help me. You're all that remains. [...] There's the world, before being seized in ice. It's vanishing. I'm disappearing with it. So please, remember it all, my child, my little one.'

### REPETITION AND TRANSFORMATION

The instances of *mise en abyme* that pervade the works analysed point to the reflexivity of the image, in keeping with the central role played by the mirror in self-representation, as discussed in Chapter 1, especially in relation to the self-portrait. As Bonafoux points out:

The self-portrait, a theme in which the mirrors that face each other and the metaphors that respond to one another open *abysms*, imposes the resort to [...] a fragmentary writing, which is that of digression, of *reprise*, of parenthesis, of *reiteration again*. A *writing of repetition* that lends itself to the gaze of the painter that shifts from the mirror to the canvas [...].<sup>50</sup>

Moreover, for Sitney, repetition in self-portraiture, again, generated by the mirror, is inseparable from the ritual gesture that inscribes the autobiographical act:

The constitutive moment of [Jerome Hill's] *Film Portrait* is the confrontation with the mirror. Yet Hill adds to this the act of shaving. As a daily ritual, it suggests that the autobiographical reflex is not a peculiar moment but a *regular pattern*, sustained and grounded by the diurnal repetition of the same act.<sup>51</sup>

In essence, repetition – and the *mise en abyme* itself – is protean and emerges in the corpus in very different ways, ranging from mimesis and identification to re-enactments, and serialisation; even the effacement of collective memory and rewriting of history elicit patterns of repetition, as discussed in Chapter 4. Moreover, repetition necessarily produces a double that brings with it an alteration of the initial gesture, so

<sup>50</sup> Pascal Bonafoux, 'Moi ! Autoportraits du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle', *op. cit.*, p. 22 (my translation and emphasis).

<sup>51</sup> P. Adams Sitney, 'Autobiography in Avant-garde Film', *op. cit.*, p. 204 (my emphasis); see also the discussion on Hill's film in Chapter 1.

that repetition and transformation are dialectically intertwined in a relation that emphasises movement and ultimately points to instances of intertextuality, parody, as well as gender performativity and empowerment.

#### *IDENTIFICATION AND MIMESIS*

Identification, too, provides a loose form of repetition in Dieutre's films. In *Mon Voyage*, it takes the shape of character identification within the diegesis, between Vincent and Itvan insofar as the former's evocation of his own childhood finds an echo in the latter's youth. To some extent, the identification is reciprocal since the teenager, who also holds a camera, wants to become a film-maker.<sup>52</sup> The *mise en abyme* of the film-making practice is thus constant. However, the mirror image provided by Itvan's presence necessarily enhances the split in identification in the Lacanian sense: Itvan is not the young replica of Vincent who is only looking at a metaphoric projection of himself. More generally, Dieutre's strategy of identification and resemblance with other characters, especially in *Leçons*, induces a sense of confusion, which coalesces with the characters' resemblance within the paintings (figs 115-118).<sup>53</sup> As he explains:

We all look a bit alike, [...] all these men with beards, etc., and those of the paintings also end up forming... only one. The characters seem to come out of the paintings, at least that's what I wanted, a confusion between the different protagonists. [...] Besides, if they all look alike physically, if I look like them, it's not a coincidence either, it's because there is, in the end, masculinity that lies around... over all this.<sup>54</sup>

This confusion, of which the multiplication of points of view partakes, enables the dispersion of the *Self* in a process of anchorage and relay of Vincent's image, and which comes across as a compensation for the impossibility to represent the self: a strategy of diversion (*détournement*), in a sense. In this way, the author reaches a transcendental, almost ubiquitous (omni)presence in his work. As a result, the resemblance with the Other provides another form of *mise en abyme* of his persona, and ultimately suggests a generic instance of masculinity, so that the film shifts from an intimate and personal to a wider social scope.

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<sup>52</sup> Vincent Dieutre, 'Entretien de Vincent Dieutre avec François Bonenfant autour de *Mon Voyage d'Hiver*', *op. cit.*

<sup>53</sup> Sometimes, the resemblance is such that there has been confusion between Caravaggio himself and his models whose identity is not always clear. Roberto Longhi, *Le Caravage*, trans. by Gérard-Julien Salvy (Paris: Éditions du Regard, 2004), p. 33.

<sup>54</sup> Both quotes 'Interview with François Bonenfant', *Leçons de Ténèbres*, DVD, *op. cit.*



Fig. 115



Fig. 116

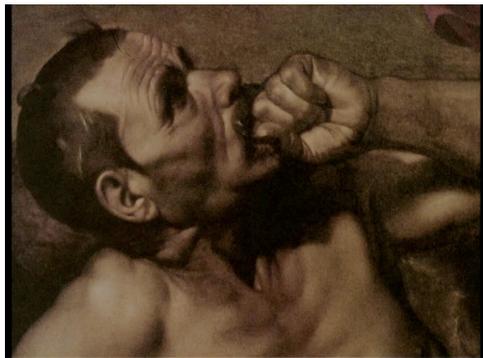


Fig. 117

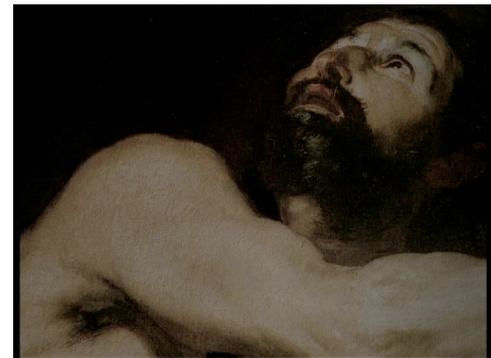


Fig. 118

***Leçons de Ténèbres* (Vincent Dieutre, 2003)**

However, Dieutre strongly denies any identification with Caravaggio's persona:

I'm very wary of the buzz surrounding Caravaggio. In fact... the film, *Leçons de Ténèbres*, is never an apology or an appropriation of the persona of Caravaggio but much more something that is a bit diffuse... in Rome or in Naples at night... to try to see if there's a sort of prolongation of this emotion that I felt in front of the paintings in the cities at night.<sup>55</sup>

Thus, and although it would be hard to ignore the loose parallel between Dieutre's dissolute life as a drug addict, living on the margins of society, and Caravaggio's notorious brawls, the resonances are perhaps more to be found in the film-maker's attempts to reproduce an atmosphere, as he suggests above; hence the recurrent reproductions of scenes that seem to come straight out of the paintings. While trying to integrate the Caravaggiesque mood, light, and expressions into his *mise en scène*, the film-maker also explores the idea of painting and art works as a surface of reflection by projecting himself onto them, as when he mimes the posture of Saint Cecilia (*Il Martirio di Santa Cecilia*, Stefano Maderno, 1599-1600, Santa Cecilia in Trastevere, Rome) (figs 119-120). Dieutre seems to experiment with the perception of emotions by inscribing them in his own body, in line with Bersani's argument about the *inscription*

<sup>55</sup> Pierre Chevalier and Simon Guibert (prods), 'Vincent Dieutre: Fragments', *op. cit.* (my translation).

of death in the body. At the same time, miming the statue also amounts to projecting himself in the future, as a prefiguration of his own death perhaps, while the marble also evokes the desire to freeze one's image in eternity.



**Fig. 119:**



**Fig. 120**

***Leçons de Ténèbres* (Vincent Dieutre, 2003)**

Sophie Calle also plays with repetition in ways that oscillate between mimesis, identification, and re-enactment. This is especially the case in a series of performances made on the theme of *Double Game*, in collaboration with Paul Auster who took inspiration from Calle's persona for one of his fictional characters (a performance artist called Maria).<sup>56</sup> In his novel, Auster not only drew from Calle's own work but also invented performances, so that, for their collaboration, Calle reversed the process and followed the rules invented by Auster. While the fictional character is itself a double of Calle, she reciprocally becomes the double of Maria with these performances and enacts the fictional events as prescribed by the writer: for instance, she spent a week following a 'chromatic diet' in which each day's meals were assigned a specific colour.<sup>57</sup> This example, just like Jerome Hill's shaving, shows how the ritual, that is, the repetition of regular patterns is not only constitutive of her artistic approach but also of autobiographical inscriptions, and in this particular case, it takes place again in intermedial terms, in-between literature and visual arts.

*RE-ENACTMENTS OR THE LIBERATING VALUE OF REPETITION*

For Otero, the return to the origins of her tragedy also elicits patterns of repetition.

<sup>56</sup> See Paul Auster, *Leviathan*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1992). This collaboration led to an exhibition, which was first held at the Centre national de la photographie, Paris, 9 September-2 November 1998. See the exhibition catalogue, Sophie Calle, *Double Game* (London: Violette Editions, 1999), and in particular, 'The Gotham Handbook', written in collaboration with Paul Auster, pp. 233-295.

<sup>57</sup> Sophie Calle, 'The Chromatic Diet', in *Double Game*, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-23.

Not only does her career as a film-maker echo that of her mother as an artist but her film also stages a series of re-enactments, also essentially based on intermedial relations, which explains the film-maker's endeavour to reproduce cinematically the colours and motives of Clotilde's painting (figs 108-109, p. 200), hence the sequence in which Mariana places the canvas amidst the meadow, or the panoramic shots of the landscape of Normandy (fig. 40, p. 114). In addition to iconic repetition, there is also a repetition of performances and gestures, as Mariana returns to the flat that the family once occupied in order to try and relive in memory situations dating from her childhood. There, her relatives reminisce about Clotilde at work, repeat the gestures and take the pose again as they did for Clotilde (fig. 121). Like the conservationist does in a previous sequence, Mariana's uncle, also a painter, holds a brush and mimes Clotilde's technique in front of a canvas (fig. 122). Rather than re-enactments in the strict sense, let alone fictional reconstitutions, these repetitions within the film create mimetic echoes of Clotilde's initial gestures, while the explicit documentary mode of address helps maintain the gap between now and then. As Emma Wilson notes, the flat is never used as a 'reconstructed family home', but rather as a 'holding space, as a temporary arena for memory work, before other spaces are opened out.'<sup>58</sup> As a result, the repetition in *Histoire* essentially manifests itself as an apparent return to the past, and has a liberating value insofar as it frees the image of Clotilde from the closet in which they had been maintained.



Fig. 121



Fig. 122

*Histoire d'un Secret* (Mariana Otero, 2003)

Writing about Raymond Roussel's use of repetition, Michel Butor explains how it can beget liberation:

<sup>58</sup> Emma Wilson, *Love, Mortality, and the Moving Image* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 58. Wilson rightly adds that the reconstruction is aimed at reminiscing the apartment as painting studio rather than domestic space, hence the bare white walls.

All the literature of Raymond Roussel is [...], like that of Proust, a search of lost time, yet this recuperation of childhood is by no means a return backward, it is, if I may use this expression, a *return forward* for the recovered event changes level and meaning.<sup>59</sup>

Repetition thus enables the characters of Roussel's novels to free themselves from their physical or psychological imprisonment in order to move forward. Butor's expression *return forward*, which he draws from Søren Kierkegaard, illustrates the situation in Otero's film, which embodies a search of lost, if not time, certainly childhood memories. This expression also finds a poetic – if enigmatic – echo in the words of her grandmother (probably a slip of the tongue). Mariana takes two Polaroid photographs of a painting that she has come to borrow for the exhibition. As her grandmother waits for the second image to appear, she says: 'this one hasn't yet reached its point of departure. But that one has' (figs 123-124). This, of course, also points to the photographic process, which begets repetition.



Fig. 123



Fig. 124

***Histoire d'un Secret* (Mariana Otero, 2003)**

The search into the past through re-enactment and repetition is liberating, and therefore therapeutic, as it enables Otero to *move forward*. This function of repetition also emerges in Dieutre's filmography. In *Rome* and *Bologna*, in particular, the re-enactments, even if they are only verbal, of his grim experiences with drugs seem to be part of the healing process, which lead to his resurrection. This is why Vincent's 'return to life' is perhaps also achieved through repetition. According to Butor, Roussel was obsessed with the desire to relive a moment of creative epiphany he experienced in his early twenties: 'I would give all the years I have left to live to relive this glory for an

<sup>59</sup> Michel Butor, 'Sur les procédés de Raymond Roussel', *Répertoire: Études, Conférences, 1* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1960), pp.173-185 (p. 184) (my translation and emphasis). Butor looks in particular at Roussel's novels *Impressions d'Afrique* (1910) and *Locus Solus* (1914).

instant.<sup>60</sup> Just like obsession, does addiction not partake, to some extent, of this impossible desire to repeat indefinitely a primal magic moment of ecstasy? At one point in *Bologna*, Vincent falls into an old pattern when he impulsively buys a bag of heroine in the street. Wondering about his gesture, he explains that it was like ‘the repetition of a ritual’. Thus, addiction is itself a repetition, which imprisons the subject. For Kierkegaard: ‘recollection is a repetition backwards and makes a person unhappy while the real repetition, when it is possible, goes forward and makes one happy’.<sup>61</sup> Thus, the first is a form of imprisonment while the latter brings liberation because it enables the subject to *return forward*. The first is static, the second enables movement.

In a different context, Giorgio Agamben draws from Deleuze’s movement image to describe a comparable form of dialectical dichotomy, which, to some extent, also echoes Benjamin’s dialectical image. Agamben, however, shifts the emphasis from image to gesture. For him, images are

animated by an antinomic polarity: on the one hand, images are the reification and cancellation of a gesture [...], on the other, they preserve the *dynamis* intact [...] The former corresponds to the recollection seized by voluntary memory, while the latter corresponds to the image flashing in the epiphany of involuntary memory. And while the former lives in magical isolation, the latter always refers beyond itself to a whole of which it is part.<sup>62</sup>

The opposition between imprisonment and liberation similarly occurs here in the context of the image as fragmented gesture, which is, on the one hand, isolated and, on the other, virtually part of a larger picture, as it were. For example, images such as *Las Meninas* or the *Mona Lisa* ‘could be seen not as immovable and eternal forms, but as fragments of a gesture or as stills of a lost film wherein only they would regain their true meaning’.<sup>63</sup> This is exactly what is at stake in the tension between movement and stillness in cinema. Movement triggers the liberation of the stilled gesture and its reintegration in a broader picture. In keeping with this, repetition, when envisaged in Kierkegaard’s positive sense, is comparable to the dynamic of freeing a suspended gesture and relating it to the train of images of that forward movement. Thus, for

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<sup>60</sup> Michel Butor, *Répertoires*, *op. cit.*, p. 184 (my translation).

<sup>61</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, ‘Repetition’, *Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 1-82 (p. 3).

<sup>62</sup> Giorgio Agamben, ‘Notes on Gesture’ [1996], *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. by Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 48-59 (p. 54).

<sup>63</sup> *Id.*, pp. 54-55.

Dieutre, as artistic gesture, the repeated staging of his past from one film to another also liberates the suspended gesture embodied by his former addictions.

Kierkegaard and Agamben's respective points and the connection with cinema also find an echo in Calle's *Douleur Exquise*, in which the alternation of her suffering and that of others amounts to a compulsive repetition, which is liberating and therapeutic, for Catherine Lemieux, in that it enables the artist to mourn her lost love by regaining control over the narrative; it is a way to exhaust her pain.<sup>64</sup> As described in Chapter 5, the thirty-six panels on which Calle's narrative is embroidered are identical but for a few details at a time. As a result, their succession embodies the passing of time and therefore movement or a sense of *dynamis*. To paraphrase Agamben, taken separately, each panel is the fragment of a gesture (the recovering process from a heartache) while the compulsive repetition of the painful and traumatic moment points to a *return forward*. This movement is all the more perceptible that each panel introduces small differences within repetition (the variable number of days, the gradual shortening of the text and its colour's gradual dissolving into the background). These cannot but evoke the filmic process, whose illusion of movement, as mentioned earlier, relies on similar incremental changes taking place in the succession of almost identical stills on the film-strip. Here too, the similarities between Calle's narrative structure and the cinematic rely on intermediality, just as re-enactment in Otero's film takes place in the intermedial dialogue between painting and film.

#### SERIALISATION

The fact of analysing several works by the same author leads to figures of repetition that run across their respective artistic production and thus produces an effect of serialisation. This is especially true of Calle and Dieutre, of course, since several of their works have been analysed, and given the continuity that they establish in their respective oeuvre by recurrently using the self as a subject matter. As far as Calle is concerned, serialisation occurs through the recurrent taking up and recycling of a performance after a temporal gap, such as *La Filature* (1981), whose structure was reused twenty years later in *Vingt Ans Après* (2001). Similarly, the pact agreed with the clairvoyant in *Où et Quand? Berck* was repeated several months later in *Où et Quand? Lourdes. Last Seen*, made in 1991, took up the narrative context of *Ghosts*, made in

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<sup>64</sup> Catherine Lemieux, 'Mélancolie et Restitutions dans *Douleur Exquise* de Sophie Calle', *Post-Scriptum.ORG* 14, (Summer, 2011), 1-9.

1989, and to some extent, the same could be argued about *Prenez Soins de Vous* (2007) in relation to *Douleur Exquise* (2003), as both deal with a heartache and on both the artist relies on other people's mediation. Every time, however, the original work is altered, updated, or transformed, thus giving way to a new performance, which ultimately emphasises difference, therefore movement, while the permanence of a gesture remains throughout. The principles – or rituals, as Calle may call them – which she puts in place point to a sense of duration and continuity over time. This is particularly evident in a piece called *The Birthday Ceremony*, which was later integrated in the artist's collaboration with Auster.<sup>65</sup> Between 1980 and 1993, Calle invited each year for her birthday the same number of people as her age and meticulously archived the presents received, expectedly in proportion to the number of guests. As she got older, her birthday cabinet of curiosities became increasingly fuller and she eventually stopped at the age of forty (fig. 125). Once again, this aptly illustrates the ritualization of the process, which, by creating the regular pattern posited by Sitney, inscribes the autobiographical act in Calle's artistic gesture.



**Fig. 125: *The Birthday Ceremony*, Sophie Calle, 1980-1993, Installation view at the Camden Arts Centre, London, 1998**

In addition, Calle recycles parts of a work for different exhibitions and installations, and thus creates several versions of the same piece, which works towards a process of serialisation, not to mention the fact that when the works travel abroad, they necessarily vary according to the language used as we shall see below. *La filature*, for

<sup>65</sup> Sophie Calle, 'The Birthday Ceremony', *Double Game*, *op. cit.*, pp. 196-231.

example, had been commissioned for an exhibition on self-portraiture.<sup>66</sup> It was expanded in subsequent versions, which is why the original version does not entail the final part in which the detective is being spied on. The work around the death of Calle's mother is another typical example. Firstly, the video of Rachel on her deathbed was shown in 2007 at the Venice Biennale. In a second phase of Calle's mourning process, it was integrated in the installation called *Rachel, Monique* in 2011 and was reworked again for the version showed in Avignon. Because subject to incessant touching up, updating, or adaptations, these become permanent works-in-progress, which is in keeping with the characteristics of the essay, as if the artist concluded them with the words 'to be continued'.<sup>67</sup> While it would be farfetched to speak of sequel *stricto sensu*, to some degree, Calle's repetition mode can be assimilated to it. As Gérard Genette notes,

[t]he *sequel* [...] continues a work not in order to bring it to a close but, on the contrary, in order to take it beyond what was initially considered to be its ending. The motive is generally a desire to capitalize on a first or even a second success [...] and it is entirely natural that an author should wish to profit from such a windfall [...].<sup>68</sup>

For Dieutre, the films analysed show recurrences in terms of geography (especially Italy), aesthetic strategies (the combined use of multiple devices) and even people, as the same man plays the stranger whom Vincent meets in Naples in *Leçons*, and Werner in *Mon Voyage*. *Leçons* and *Mon Voyage* form the first and second part of what Dieutre had conceived as a European trilogy.<sup>69</sup> And globally, the works discussed here draw a map of Europe so that the serialisation somehow acquires a spatial dimension. More importantly in his construction of serialisation, however, is the notion of *trick*, a slang term that designates a sexual intercourse and, more precisely in the gay jargon, that only takes place once. Dieutre borrows the term from Renaud Camus's eponymous autobiographical novel, in which the author describes a series of sexual

<sup>66</sup> *Photographic Self-portraits 1898-1981*, Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, 8 July-14 September 1981. Curated by Alain Sayag in collaboration with Dominique Gaessler & Marie-France Vanden-Bussche. See Alain Sayag & Denis Roche, *Autoportraits photographiques 1898-1981*, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Herscher, 1981).

<sup>67</sup> *À suivre*, which also means 'to be continued/followed', is the title of the shadowing series in the French version; see *À Suivre...*, *Livre IV* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1998); English version: 'To Follow', *Double Game*, op. cit., pp. 68-139.

<sup>68</sup> Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* [1982], trans. by Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p. 206.

<sup>69</sup> The third film, which was apparently never made, was due to take place in the United Kingdom. Pierre Chevalier and Simon Guibert (prods), 'Vincent Dieutre: Fragments', op. cit.

encounters with a different man each time.<sup>70</sup> For Barthes, because Camus's stories are told in a neutral and factual style, they do not lend themselves to interpretation: 'They are surfaces without shadows, *without ulterior motives*.'<sup>71</sup> This is why Dieutre argues that 'the trick only makes sense in the series, in repetition, often it may go along a sort of quest [...] or a lack, at which point it becomes interesting'; thus, in itself, it is a 'blank operation'.<sup>72</sup> The trick functions as a mechanism of pure repetition that subverts the structure of the narrative, and in this lies its radicality. As Barthes claims, through its narrative *simplicity*, the trick is a form of silence that refuses social injunction: 'Reality is fiction, writing is truth: such is the ruse of language. Renaud Camus's *Tricks* are *simple*. This means that they speak homosexuality, but never speak about it.'<sup>73</sup> In this sense, it could be argued that the tricks *perform* homosexual discourse. Furthermore, for Barthes, the eroticisation of sex only exists through literary stylisation, while the trick presents the sexual act in its bare factuality and thus radicality. Dieutre admittedly aimed to achieve a similar figure in *Rome Désolée*, whose sound narrative is a succession of sexual encounters intertwined with the search for drugs; hence the crudeness of his descriptions, reduced to mere factuality, as well as the neutrality of his tone, which could be interpreted as the refusal of stylisation and unified narrative structure described by Barthes. As a result, the minimalist and fragmented off-screen narratives enhance the film-maker's disembodied aimless roaming in the city and melancholia 'while trying to retain [the latter's] substance through language, and the relation between words and image'.<sup>74</sup> Sexual encounters are also staged in Dieutre's other films but they are devoid of the serial dimension evoked here and suggest emotional commitment. This points to another form of repetition, from one film to another, which is that of citation and intertextuality.

#### (SELF-)CITATION

Many of the forms of repetition described above are intertextual or rather *intratextual* given that the authors cite their own works or elements thereof. For

<sup>70</sup> Renaud Camus, *Tricks: Twenty-Five Encounters*, trans. by Richard Howard, intr. by Roland Barthes (New York; London: High Risk, [1981] 1996).

<sup>71</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Preface', in Renaud Camus, *Tricks*, *op. cit.*, p. viii.

<sup>72</sup> Vincent Dieutre, 'Et Plus si Affinités... : le Trick Comme Figure de la Modernité au Cinéma', in *La Rencontre : au Cinéma, Toujours l'Inattendu Arrive*, ed. by Jacques Aumont (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes/La Cinémathèque française, 2007), pp. 37-55 (p. 38, my translation, as in below).

<sup>73</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Preface', *op. cit.*, p. viii.

<sup>74</sup> Vincent Dieutre, 'Et Plus si Affinités...', *op. cit.*, p. 55.

example, towards the end of *Leçons*, the caption ROME DESOLEE appears in white capital letters against a black screen, above the vague silhouette of a man sitting at a table on stage. As it turns out, this is an actor dubbing the film during its projection, and the spectator understands gradually that Vincent is attending a public screening of *Rome* (fig. 126). The following shot reveals the close-up of a child sleeping, while people's legs as they pass by intermittently obtrude the camera's field of vision: this is *Rome*'s final sequence (fig. 127). It is not coincidental that this scene should appear in *Leçons* for the film-maker establishes correspondences between the films, which work towards building a broader autobiographical space that exceeds the film's frame: Vincent's memories of his life in Rome are bound to re-emerge in his subsequent visits to the city, by way of images of *Rome Désolée*, for example, which haunt Diestre's cinematographic and autobiographical space.



Fig. 126



Fig. 127

***Leçons de Ténèbres* (Vincent Diestre, 2000)**

Yet, it is especially in Sophie Calle's work that self-citation is the most persistent. In *Double Blind*, she and Greg visit their friends, the couple Susan Rothenberg and Bruce Nauman. During the evening, as she explains retrospectively, she tells the story of a man who discovered that his wife no longer loved him, a painful moment he associated with sitting in his car, a blue American convertible. While this story is an obvious hint at her own failing relationship, it reappears in *Douleur Exquise*, on one of the panels intertwined with the artist's narrative (fig. 128). Elsewhere, photographs, anecdotes, or objects related to her relationship with Shepard, and featured in the film, resurface in other works: here the photograph of a fake wedding ceremony, there the story about a painting he owned.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, a photograph of her posing as a saint in *Où et Quand? Lourdes*, as well as reproductions of *ex votos* from the grotto are reused in

<sup>75</sup> Sophie Calle, *True Stories*, Hasselblad Award 2010 (Steidl: Hasselblad Foundation, 2010), pp. 71-91.

*Rachel Monique* (2010), as evoked in Chapter 5. As for Dieutre, the links created through these constant internal references build autobiographical narrative continuity, despite their fragmentary character.



est une image de bonheur qui m'a fait le plus souffrir. Cela se passait en 1964. Au printemps. Sur le boulevard Montparnasse. Un dimanche matin ensoleillé. Je possédais une voiture américaine neuve, avec un intérieur en cuir bleu. La femme que j'aimais et mon fils, en imperméable jaune citron, m'accompagnaient. En conduisant, j'ai réalisé la rareté d'un tel moment de félicité. Ce bonheur, je l'ai perdu, et cette image m'est revenue, tel un couteau qui coupe comme la mort du bonheur. L'impossibilité définitive du bonheur. Je faisais toutes les nuits le même rêve. Il se déroulait dans une rue, dans un lieu public, la femme que j'aimais se taisait, mais elle disait tout à l'heure : "Je ne t'aime plus !" Une évidence, Dieu le sait, mais elle ne parlait en cinémascope. Ce cauchemar, je l'ai fait toutes les nuits pendant sept ans. Exactement autant de nuits malheureuses que j'avais vécu de jours heureux. Comme le négatif de mon bonheur. Le jour, je songeais à la voiture bleue et à l'imperméable jaune, et la nuit, hop...

**Fig. 128: Douleur Exquise**  
(Sophie Calle, 2003)



**Fig. 129: Mon Voyage d'Hiver**  
(Vincent Dieutre, 2003)

Hypertextuality, the term preferred by Genette over intertextuality, emphasises the act of writing *over* the original text (the '*hypotext*').<sup>76</sup> He thus uses the term *palimpsest* to underscore the signification implied in the prefixes *hyper* and *hypo*: 'on the same parchment, one text can become superimposed upon another, which it does not quite conceal but allows to show through'.<sup>77</sup> This terminology entails a temporal connotation, in keeping with what is at work here: 'a new function is superimposed upon and interwoven with an older structure, and the dissonance between these two concurrent elements imparts its flavor to the resulting whole'.<sup>78</sup> The figure of the palimpsest is particularly illustrative, in a literal sense, of the superimposition process used by Dieutre in *Mon Voyage*, on two occasions in particular. In the first, Itvan is in a historical museum in Dresden, one of Germany's most damaged cities during the war. Gradually, archive footage of the city in ruins is superimposed onto the present image of Itvan. The effect created suggests that the past emerges from underneath, from the image's depth, as if the present could not quite dissimulate the past upon which it is being written (fig. 129). The second example, already described in detail (see

<sup>76</sup> Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests*, *op. cit.*, p. 5. Genette also coins the word *hyperfilmicity* in the context of cinema (p. 156).

<sup>77</sup> *Id.*, p. 398-399.

<sup>78</sup> *Id.*, p. 398.

Chapter 4), is that of the closing sequence in which Vincent progressively vanishes from the image while the Berlin wall re-emerges (figs 64-67 p. 152). This latter sequence is probably taken from a previous film that Dieutre made in Berlin (*Lettres de Berlin/Letters from Berlin*, France, 1988) and might in this sense be a self-citation too. In any case, this citation of earlier images essentially stresses historical and temporal parallels: the subtexts, or *subfilms*, being the war and the splitting of the country, whose traces are still visible beneath the transparent images of the present.

#### PASTICHE AND PARODY

Calle is the only artist in the corpus who systematically resorts to humour, irony, and even satire, which partake of the strategies of play that define her art.<sup>79</sup> Although pastiche and parody tend to be used as synonyms, Genette refines the distinction: the first is a work of imitation and the second a work of transformation. Moreover, while they are not satirical, both pertain to the ‘ludic mode of the hypertext’.<sup>80</sup> In this sense, *Double Blind* could readily be regarded as a pastiche of the road movie, which is not necessarily satirical since it does not explicitly mock the genre. Another example is *Prenez Soins de Vous*, inaugurated at the Venice Biennale in 2007, which can be regarded as a non satirical parody and evokes the Oulipian games, regarded by Genette as the site of parody par excellence.<sup>81</sup> As in *Douleur Exquise*, *Prenez Soins de Vous* deals with another heartache. This time, however, Calle receives the news of the breakup by email and not by telegram (another sign that time has passed and technology evolved). Her partner ends his letter wishing her well and recommending her to *take care of herself*. Following his advice, as she puts it, she asks 107 women, of all ages and professional backgrounds, to interpret the letter according to their speciality: the dancers dance the letter, actresses read or interpret it, vocalists sing it, scholars analyse it, the teenager *texts* it, and so forth. The list of women ironically includes a parrot and two theatre puppets. For Yves Hersant, her performance is of a hermeneutic nature and

<sup>79</sup> On the paramount social relevance of play, which provides an enlightening understanding of Calle’s play strategies, see Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, trans. by Meyer Barash (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, [1958] 1961). Otherwise, the weight of chance and randomness has been essentially analysed in relation to the Surrealists and the Situationists. See, among others, Cécile Camart, ‘Sophie Calle alias Sophie Calle: Le ‘je’ d’un narcissé éclaté’, *Art Press. Fictions d’artistes. Autobiographies, récits, supercheries*, 5 (April, 2002), 30-35; Whitney Chadwick, ‘Three Artists/Three Women: Orlan, Annette Messager, and Sophie Calle’, *Sites*, 4: 1 (Spring, 2000), 111-118. More generally,

<sup>80</sup> Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests*, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>81</sup> See in particular, Raymond Queneau’s *Exercices in Style*, trans. by Barbara Wright (London: Gollancz, 1958), in which the author tells a short story using a different style each time.

‘consists in considering *mediately* the text that petrifies her: to overcome it, she calls hermeneuts for help.’<sup>82</sup> This partakes for Hersant of an attempt to exhaust the meaning of the email sent, a process during which Calle, who was the recipient of the message, becomes the author of the performance, and thereby regains control, in a way comparable to the use of repetition in *Douleur Exquise*: each interpretation is different but they are all variants of the same matrix.

While the terms parody and pastiche will not be used in strict reference to Genette’s complex classification, it is interesting to note the emphasis he puts on the notion of transformation in these figures of repetition. In any case, Calle’s work, which resists any attempt at classification, operates through a displacement and diversion of meanings and lies in-between pastiche and parody. In one particular example, she combines both forms to which she adds a highly satirical tone, what Genette would describe as caricature.

The performance *Des Journées Entières Sous le Signe du B, du C du W* (*Days Under the Sign of B, C, & W*) is part of Calle’s collaboration with Auster.<sup>83</sup> The title is self-explanatory: she spent days doing things related to words, places, events, or names starting with each of these letters. In the French version, the section corresponding to the letter B is entitled *Nature Morte*, which means ‘still life’ but also translates literally as ‘dead nature’.<sup>84</sup> It consists of a list of fourteen names or verbs starting with the letter *b* and related to animals: ‘B for the Beauty and the Bestiary [...]’.<sup>85</sup> In addition, a portrait of Calle shows her lying in a bed surrounded by taxidermized animals. She is wearing a blond wig as well as suggestive lingerie, both evoking 1960’s fashion (fig. 130). In the French version, Calle is explicit about the parodic and pastiche dimension of the work, which is probably only accessible to a French audience anyway. Yet, to avoid the risk of action for slander, as she mischievously puts it, she only indirectly designates the image of reference – the *hypophotograph*, as it were – by giving clues to the spectator: ‘the reference photograph [...] can be found in a magazine that we shall not name, dated 2 November 1989’.<sup>86</sup> The reference in question, which is easily deciphered, is a photograph of Brigitte Bardot (nicknamed BB by the media) published

<sup>82</sup> Yves Hersant, ‘L’Autorité de Sophie Calle’, *Critique: Revue Générale des Publications Françaises et Étrangères*, 731 (April, 2008), 341-349, p. 344.

<sup>83</sup> Sophie Calle, ‘Days Under the Sign of B, C, & W’, *Double Game* (London: Violette Editions, 1999), pp. 22-31. French version: *De l’obéissance, (Livre I): série Doubles-Jeux*, (Arles: Actes Sud, 1998).

<sup>84</sup> In the version presented at the 2003 exhibition at the Centre Pompidou, this section is entitled B.B.; in English, this section is entitled ‘B for Big-Time Blonde Bimbo’, *id.*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>85</sup> Sophie Calle, ‘Days Under the Sign of B, C, & W’, p. 24-25; *De l’obéissance, op. cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>86</sup> Sophie Calle, *De l’obéissance, op. cit.*, p. 39.

in a weekly magazine (fig. 131).<sup>87</sup> In the last decades, Bardot has only made rare public appearances and usually only in relation to the defence of animal rights. In this sense, the stuffed animals in Calle's pastiche can only be interpreted as provocation, especially as nearly all the words listed (except for 'belle') carry a figurative derogatory sense emphasising stupidity or brutality. The multi-layered satire does not only tackle the former beauty icon and the stereotype of the 'blond bimbo'. The title, *Nature Morte*, also harks back to the etymological sense of the word pastiche, which comes from painting, and underscores the visual dimension of the imitation. In so doing, it plays with the contrast between nature (animals, wildlife) and artificiality (the 'Technicolor feel' of the photograph), thus emphasising the ridicule and artificiality of the *mise en scène* of the image of reference, despite semiotic markers of naturalness and bucolicism (such as the wooden bed or the flowery linen).



Fig. 130: *Le Bestiaire* (Sophie Calle, 1998)



Fig. 131: Brigitte Bardot (1989)

Finally, and this is the most interesting aspect, Calle is also parodying *her self*: here she performs the objectification of Bardot's image; but in the shadowing series, she reverses the situation and returns the male gaze as she spies on the detective hired to follow her, or stalks a stranger in Venice. She thereby also parodies the clichés of the noir genre: 'I wear a beige raincoat, a scarf, and dark glasses.'<sup>88</sup> In *Double Blind*, she laughs at her own irrepressible desire to get married by mocking the wedding ceremony. Overall, her self-parodies tend to play on her own contradictions and entail some degree of ambiguity, so that humour and irony pervade her work, and this includes the treatment of her painful experiences, such as her mother's death. As a process of transformation, parody introduces distance between the original work on which it is

<sup>87</sup> 'B.B. Contre la Chasse', *Paris Match*, 2110, 2 November 1989, p. 116.

<sup>88</sup> Sophie Calle, 'Suite Vénitienne' [2<sup>nd</sup> part of the sequence 'To Follow'], in *Double Game*, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-121 (p. 84).

based and the new one produced and it is perhaps in this ludic gap that Calle negotiates the relation between her self and the *mise en scène* of her public persona. It is not so much that she transforms her real life into fictional life or vice versa, but rather that parody allows her to treat specific issues, including her intimacy, with much needed distance. As a result, to adapt Genette's terminology, it could be argued that Calle's performances are not hypertexts but *hyperacts* written over her 'real life', which becomes visible by the same token.

#### PARODYING THE PATRIARCHIVE

Calle's use of parody thus extends to gender constructions and deconstruction. In *North Pole* (2009), one of the installations that formed part of the exhibition *Rachel, Monique*, it becomes a parody of the *patriarchive*. Before developing this point, however, it is necessary to come back to the discussion initiated in Chapter 4 about the archive, in specific relation to gender. Plato assimilates the archive to the place of the male, as Derrida observes in *Khôra*:

As for the race of men (*genos anthropôn*), the Egyptian priest of the *Timaeus* ascribes 'places' to it: these are places propitious to memory, to the conservation of archives, to writing and tradition, these tempered zones, which protect from destruction by excess of heat and cold (22e-23a).<sup>89</sup>

Thus, Plato not only associates the archive with the 'race of men' but also with moderation, away from excessive temperatures (and tempers) associated with femininity. In *Archive Fever*, Derrida mentions a comment made by historian Sonia Combe about the fact that the overwhelming majority of well-known historians are men.<sup>90</sup> The *patriarchive* corresponds to a construction of the archive, *as controlled by men*. It is this male authority ruling the archive that Mariana Otero, Alina Marazzi, and Sophie Calle, to some extent, bring into question. Hence, in *North Pole*, Calle travels to the Antarctic to pay a tribute to her mother by burying in the snow three objects that belonged to Rachel: her necklace, her diamond ring, and her portrait (fig. 41, p. 114). The situation, however, takes on a humorous tone when the artist explains the history of the ring:

During the war, my grandfather hid in the mountains of Grenoble. Afraid that the small building he owned in town might be seized, he swapped it for

<sup>89</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Khôra*, *op. cit.*, endnote n. 9, p. 104 (my translation).

<sup>90</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, *op. cit.*, footnote n. 1, p. 4.

a diamond ring. Not a good deal. My grandmother did not talk to him for a year. But she kept the *solitaire*.  
I waited to reach the most northern place of this trip to go ashore. [...] I chose a stone and buried the portrait, the necklace, and the ring. Thus, my mother reached the Great North [...].<sup>91</sup>

With this symbolic re-enactment of Rachel's burial, whereby the objects explicitly stand for extensions of her body, Calle is also re-inventing an archive, a *matriarchive* to be precise, aimed at future generations, as discussed in Chapter 3, which prompts her to speculate about the advent of the ring that is so significant in the family history: 'In thousands of years, perhaps, glaciologists shall find the ring [...] [u]nless a beach-comber finds it and swaps it for a house in Grenoble.'<sup>92</sup> By the same token, she thumbs her nose at her grandfather and at the preservation of the family jewels as she plays with myths about buried treasures. Finally, what adds to the irony is the place she has chosen to bury the ring: the Northern glacier, which could not be more opposed to the tempered zones prescribed by Plato for the protection of the archive.

#### RECLAIMING THE MATRIARCHIVE

The tone of Mariana Otero and Alina Marazzi's respective films is devoid of Calle's irony and sense for parody but the transmission crisis that they raise similarly takes on a gender dimension in relation to the matriarchive. It is not insignificant that it is the daughters – women – who carry out, through film-making, the reconstruction and transmission of their mother's archive. In both cases, the respective belongings of Clotilde (paintings, clothes, photographs) and Luisa (letters, diaries, notebooks) were kept in a chest (yet another uncanny coincidence) that ultimately symbolises the taboo around their death. For Otero, although the silence was not actively imposed by her father, she and her sister perceived it as an interdict to name or evoke Clotilde. Thus, by bringing their mother back out of the domestic closet of secrecy and oblivion, Otero and Marazzi blur the separation between, on the one hand, the closed and confined realm of the private sphere usually associated with the feminine and, on the other, the social and political domain of the public sphere associated with the masculine.<sup>93</sup> Moreover,

<sup>91</sup> Sophie Calle, 'The first time I used in a text the words "climate change"', *op. cit.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Marazzi acknowledges that to make this film was to go against the veto imposed upon private and family matters. Alina Marazzi, 'Entretien avec Chiara Mangiarotti', in *Lacan regarde le cinéma: le cinéma regarde Lacan*, Colloque de Venise, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: École de la cause freudienne/collection Rue Huysmans, 2011), pp. 179-191 (p. 184).

Clotilde and Luisa's respective fate embodies the feminine condition at times of pre-feminist awareness: stuck between tradition and the rejection of such values, they may not have realised the political and social scope of their situation, which, like many other women at the time, they only perceived on a personal level. Consequently, with their films, Otero and Marazzi bypass and disrupt the patriarchal control over women's personal archive. This is not to posit that they substitute themselves for their father (or grand-father, in Marazzi's case) who, again, is to be understood in symbolic terms. Yet, their artistic and authorial gesture breaks the lock that prevented access to *patriarchival* knowledge and brings into question the transmission made – or not for that matter – on patriarchal terms. Although Marazzi's film consists essentially of home movies produced by the family's patriarch, her film reflects the process of her taking possession of his images. As she slows down the movement, freezes the frames, edits the images together with her mother's letters and her own voice over, she imprints her authorial gesture onto her grandfather's images. She also tries to grasp Luisa's unease, insecurity, and feeling of inadequacy in stark contrast with the footage of an upper middle-class family throwing social parties and cruising, in other words, the image of a seemingly perfect world (figs 92-93, p. 178). Marazzi, just like Otero, re-establishes the broken link with her mother through her artistic endeavour. Their authorial voice and artistic practice enable them to regain control over the *matriarchive*, which counterbalances male knowledge and power, that is, the male predominance in the preservation and transmission of the archive pointed out by Derrida.<sup>94</sup> This means that they recreate a form of transmission between mother and daughter through their respective film: when Marazzi explains why she used her own voice to read from her mother's letters and diaries in *Un'ora*, she speaks of 'handing over the baton' between her mother and herself.<sup>95</sup>

However, the transmission is carried out on a negative strip, as it were, for it also conveys the mother's loss – *the archive fever* –, which is not merely symbolic but effective and traumatic. As explained in Chapter 4, the concept of *chora* points to the quest for the narrative of origins, exceeds the archive, and contains its own denial. It will provide once again a useful theoretical framework, but this time in the light of feminist interpretations. These, which, are not mentioned by Derrida in his book (*Khôra*), allow for a broader understanding of the *chora*. In *Bodies that Matter*, Judith

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<sup>94</sup> See Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>95</sup> Alina Marazzi, 'Entretien avec Chiara Mangiarotti', *op. cit.*, p. 181.

Butler reassesses Luce Irigaray's own reading of and virulent attack against Plato's *Timaeus*. To briefly summarise the argument: Plato makes a distinction between the material and the immaterial. In this opposition, women tend to be associated with the former and men with the latter, that is, with the principle of rational mastery. For Butler, 'Irigaray wants to argue that in fact the feminine is precisely what is excluded in and by such a binary opposition'.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, 'when matter is described within philosophical descriptions, [...] it is at once a substitution for and a displacement of the feminine'.<sup>97</sup> As a result, the 'figures that philosophy provides' are unsatisfactory to 'interpret the philosophical relation to the feminine', hence, it must be done by 'siting the feminine as the unspeakable condition of figuration, as that which can *never be* figured within the terms of philosophy proper, but whose exclusion from that propriety is its enabling condition'.<sup>98</sup> This is why Irigaray sees the feminine as 'figures that function improperly, as an improper transfer of sense, [...] and that return to haunt and coopt the very language from which the feminine is excluded'.<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, for Irigaray, the exclusion of the feminine takes place through the formulation of matter, in the distinction between form and matter precisely, whereby 'matter as a *site* of inscription cannot be explicitly thematized'.<sup>100</sup> This space of inscription is a materiality, which is not the same as the category of matter. By contrast, Butler describes Plato's conception of the form as the precondition for the coming into existence of any material object. In other words, the form, associated with the masculine, conceives, while the *chora* receives. The feminine is thus an inscriptional space, a 'specular surface, which receives the marks of a masculine signifying act [...] without making any contribution of its own'.<sup>101</sup> This, of course, is in keeping with the Freudian opposition between male activity and feminine passivity. Without going too far into Irigaray's complex argument, this explains why, unlike Kristeva, she rejects Plato's metaphor of the *chora* as womb or nurse figure, because this is what enables him to deny a body, a form, and intelligibility to the feminine.

Otero and Marazzi's quest for the lost body of the mother takes on a much broader resonance against this theoretical backdrop. Beyond the need for maternal

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<sup>96</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge, 1993), quoting Luce Irigaray, (*Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, [1974] 1985), p. 37.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *Id.*, p. 37.

<sup>100</sup> *Id.*, p. 38.

<sup>101</sup> *Id.*, p. 39.

transmission, this desire to *figure* or to give a body to the mother can perhaps be understood as an attempt to bring the excluded feminine back inside, to make sense of the unintelligible. However, for Butler, the receptacle eventually ‘stands for the excluded and thus performs or enacts yet another set of exclusions of all that remains unfigurable under the sign of the feminine – that in the feminine which resists the figure of the nurse-receptacle’.<sup>102</sup> Similarly here, the film-makers’ gesture also contains (and generates) its own impossibility because the films are necessarily, by the same token, the statement of a void or crisis. Finally, the relevance of this discussion also lies in the fact that the chora, as an impossible quest for the origins, emphasises perhaps an element that distinguishes the matriarchive from the patriarchive: the first is not a mere feminine version of the latter but differentiates itself more profoundly from it by transmitting the awareness that its object is always already lost.

#### GENDER PERFORMATIVITY AND EMPOWERMENT

Sophie Calle blurs the traditional gendered distribution of roles by playing with the notions of power and authority. Even when she is in the passive position of the woman who has been left by her partner, she regains control over the situation thanks to the performance, but it is certainly in the shadowing series that this reversal is the most manifest. In *La Filature*, she plays at the boundaries between scopophilia and exhibitionism, as well as between control and loss of control, as she ambiguously subjects herself to the male gaze of the detective. If Calle did not know the exact date of the shadowing, she knew that it was due to take place within a predetermined time gap, so that she would actually be watched for one day but feel virtually watched for an entire week. Of course, this limited handover of control is only rhetoric since she simultaneously arranged to spy on the detective. The manipulation is thus twofold: not only did the detective ignore that the very person to be tailed was the instigator, but he was in turn followed and photographed, that is to say, beaten at his own game. Calle’s active role is not limited to her position as author: as she chooses the direction of her wanderings, she is also in control of her follower’s destination. Conversely, while the detective is spying on her, he remains passive insofar as he is subject to her plans. She had already exploited this ambivalence in *Suite Vénitienne*, whereby, commenting on the man she followed all the way from Paris in Venice, she states that she is ‘at his

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<sup>102</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

disposal'.<sup>103</sup> In a symmetrically opposite position, in *La Filature (The Detective)*, she writes in her diary: 'I want to show "him" the streets, the places I love. I want "him" to be with me as I go through the Luxembourg [...]', whilst aware of the reciprocity of the situation: 'I structured his day, Thursday April 16, in much the same way that he has influenced mine'.<sup>104</sup> In this sense, the voyeur's position also entails a degree of passivity and *vice versa*, so that Calle perverts the association established by Freud of masculinity with activity, on the one hand, and femininity with passivity, on the other.<sup>105</sup> If Freud acknowledges the dialectical and reversible relationship between voyeurism and exhibitionism, he nonetheless posits that activity (and thus scopophilia) takes place before passivity (and thus exhibitionism), which seems in contradiction with the fact that these instincts, which originate in narcissism, are a simultaneous process of looking at (oneself) and being looked at.<sup>106</sup> It is precisely what Calle's work emphasises, as she plays down the gendered distribution of roles in terms of passivity versus activity, so that the separation line between the active male and the passive female is no longer clear. However, it must be stressed that Calle's strategy partakes of perversion rather than subversion, contrary to Dieutre's approach.

The issues of gender performativity and of empowerment in the case of Vincent Dieutre are necessarily channelled through his homosexuality, which *informs*, to borrow Bersani's expression, that is, shapes his being and grasping of the world. In line with this, Jack Bauscio posits the existence of a 'gay sensibility':

I define the gay sensibility as a creative energy reflecting a consciousness that is different from the mainstream; a heightened awareness of certain human complications of feeling that spring from the fact of social oppression; in short, a perception of the world which is coloured, shaped, directed and defined by the fact of one's gayness.<sup>107</sup>

There clearly is something of that 'gay sensibility' in Dieutre's work, which goes beyond the homosexual or homoerotic dimension of the bodies he films and eventually

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<sup>103</sup> Sophie Calle, 'Suite Vénitienne', *op. cit.*, p. 106.

<sup>104</sup> Sophie Calle, 'The Detective', in *Double Game*, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-139 (p. 126).

<sup>105</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Instincts and the Vicissitudes* (1915), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, (1914-1916)*, ed. by James Strachey, vol. 14, 12<sup>th</sup> edn (London: The Hogarth Press, 1995), pp. 109-140.

<sup>106</sup> Respectively, Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (1901-1905)*, ed. by James Strachey, vol. 7, 14<sup>th</sup> edn (London: The Hogarth Press, 1995), pp. 125-245 (p. 167); Sigmund Freud, 'Instincts and the Vicissitudes', *op. cit.*, p. 129.

<sup>107</sup> Jack Bauscio, 'Camp and the Gay Sensibility' in *Gays & Film*, ed. by Richard Dyer, rev. edn, (New York: Zoetrope, 1984), pp. 40-58 (p. 40), (my emphasis).

inflects his gaze upon the poor, the homeless, and generally all those living on the margins of society. In other words, this gay sensibility also has a social and political resonance, which harks back to the function of the trick. The open exposure of his sexuality in his films is thus inherent to a form of political radicality.

Writing on the historical evolution of gay political activism at times of rising awareness of AIDS, Bersani provides a complex but enlightening interpretation of a subversive form of empowerment within gay culture through the affirmation of sexuality as an abdication of power. Quoting Jeffrey Weeks, he explains how the gay liberation movement of the 1960s and early 1970s suggested a distinction between homosexuality, defined in terms of sexual preference, and gayness, 'which was a subversively political way of life'.<sup>108</sup> This means that homosexuals, as opposed to gay activists, advocated a political implication in society that was not driven by their sexuality. This debate comes down to the opposition between the assumption, on the one hand, and the rejection, on the other, of a necessary coincidence between sexual and political radicalism. What added to the confusion, for Bersani, was the belief among gay activists that their political radicalism was defined by their social and political marginality 'as an oppressed minority'; yet this cannot be separated from sexuality, a conjunction in which he sees 'more crucially operative continuities between political sympathies on the one hand and, on the other, fantasies connected with sexual pleasure'.<sup>109</sup> There is something intrinsic to male homosexual desire that has to do with giving up power, in keeping with the longstanding belief that '*to be penetrated is to abdicate power*'.<sup>110</sup> And for Bersani, it should not be denied because

[p]hallocentrism is exactly that: not primarily the denial of power to women [...], but above all the denial of the *value* of powerlessness in both men and women. I don't mean the value of gentleness, or nonaggressiveness, or even of passivity, but rather of a more radical disintegration and humiliation of the self.<sup>111</sup>

Hence, the disintegration and humiliation of the self has value, and in the acknowledgement of this value lies the transgression of the polarity between power and subordination. Drawing on Bataille, Bersani adds that this transgression 'may be the

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<sup>108</sup> Jeffrey Weeks (*Sexuality and its Discontents: Meanings, Myths and Modern Sexualities*, London, Boston, & Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985, p. 198), quoted in Leo Bersani, 'Is the Rectum a Grave?', *October: AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*, 43 (Winter, 1987), 197-222, p. 205.

<sup>109</sup> *Id.*, p. 206.

<sup>110</sup> *Id.*, p. 212.

<sup>111</sup> *Id.*, pp. 216-217.

profound sense of both certain mystical experiences and of human sexuality'.<sup>112</sup> On reflection, indeed, the value of the abdication of power, also lies at the basis of Christianity, in terms of *sacrifice*, a common ground that transpires in Dietre's mystic and sensory quest in *Leçons*. Moreover, his general attitude towards drugs, suffering, and sex certainly points to that refusal to deny, to that *radical disintegration and humiliation of the self* and verges on the limits between life and death. As Bersani concludes,

[g]ay men's 'obsession' with sex, far from being denied, should be celebrated [...] because it never stops re-presenting the internalized phallic male as an infinitely loved object of sacrifice. Male homosexuality advertises the risk of the sexual itself as the risk of self-dismissal, of *losing sight* of the self, and in so doing it proposes and dangerously represents *jouissance* as a mode of asceticism.<sup>113</sup>

By sacrifice, Bersani is specifically referring to the contemporary angst-ridden context of the AIDS epidemic. As Dietre refuses to ignore the ugliness of the world and the inexorability of death, the staging – however only verbal – of his sexuality also amounts to the affirmation of life in its very dangers and senselessness. This takes place as he shifts the lines beyond a certain threshold and constantly navigates between life and death, between Eros and Thanatos as he puts it himself. There is in this a political stance as well, which amounts to rejecting a certain form of power and, on the contrary, choosing and celebrating the value of powerlessness.

Finally, '[i]t is possible to think of the sexual as, precisely, moving between a hyperbolic sense of self and a loss of consciousness of self'; in other words, the sexual oscillates between the 'phallicizing of the ego', on the one hand, and 'self-abolition', on the other. This means that it is not sexuality *per se* that induces struggles for power in human relations but rather the investment of the ego in sexuality, that is, the practice of sex as 'self-hyperbole'. While men, given their anatomy, are more likely to opt for the latter, 'neither sex has exclusive rights to the practice of sex as self-hyperbole', what Calle's *mises en scène* around gender stereotypes also illustrate.<sup>114</sup> Bersani's claim thus amounts to emphasising the difference between sexuality and gender and the way in which power relations determined through gender tend to be instrumentalized through sexuality.

<sup>112</sup> Leo Bersani, 'Is the Rectum a Grave?', *op. cit.*, p. 217.

<sup>113</sup> *Id.*, p. 222.

<sup>114</sup> *Id.*, p. 218.

## CONCLUSION: THE BODY IS THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE

In a video entitled *Mutaflor* (1996), Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist creates the illusion that the camera penetrates her body through her mouth and comes out again through her anus (fig. 132). Her ludic performance evokes to Anne Söll the swallowing of both camera and cameraman by the protagonist in *A Photographic Contortion* (aka *The Big Swallow*, James Williamson, UK, 1901) (fig. 133), but Rist goes one step further as she not only swallows the apparatus, and thereby the spectator, but also digests and excretes them.<sup>1</sup>



**Fig. 132: *Mutaflor* (Pipilotti Rist, 1996)**



**Fig. 133: *A Photographic Contorsion* (James Williamson, 1901)**

The loop projection introduces circularity between the inside and outside of her body whose mutual connection is established via the device. As such, it generates a reciprocal process of internalisation of the Other (the swallowing) and of externalisation of the Self (the artist's virtual offering of her inner body to the external gaze), while the repetition process (the loop structure) emphasises the dynamics of this relation. In the context of gender, Judith Butler argues that the boundary between the 'inner' and the 'outer' worlds of the subject is 'tenuously maintained for the purposes of social regulation and control'; this border, however, is moving and unstable because the surface of the body is permeable.<sup>2</sup> It is precisely this permeability of the boundary between the 'inner' and the 'outer' that Rist performs in her video in a literal and ironic manner, while the movement enhanced by the repetitive structure enables this connection by showing that the surfaces of both skin and image are not impenetrable.

<sup>1</sup> Anne Söll, *Arbeit am Körper: Videos und Videoinstallationen von Pipilotti Rist* (München: Schreiber, 2004), pp. 124-129.

<sup>2</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York; London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 133-134.

By the same token, Rist sums up the artistic gesture at work in self-representation in the moving image in general, and in the case studies in particular: a typical process of *exposed intimacy*.

As a result, the crossing of borders between inside and outside consists of a ritual that lies at the heart of self-representation and stages a process of transformation that shall ultimately enable the subjects to move forward. Calle, Dieutre, and Otero reinvent themselves in the course of their self-representation. It is not a coincidence that *Histoire* marks a turn in the latter's career: from television to cinema, and mostly, from direct cinema to a much more embodied authorial presence in her subsequent films. Similarly, for Calle and Dieutre, it is not simply the issues dealt with that allow for therapy or reassessment to take place but a much deeper form of reinvention and transformation in repetition, duration and through performance, that is through movement. This gesture consists in performing the instability between inside and outside whereby the two terms also stand, by extension, for a whole series of binary oppositions such as the hidden versus the open, the individual versus the collective, or the private versus the public.

Overall, and this is a characteristic that exceeds the case studies, self-representation is prompted by the need to deal with a crisis, a lack, or a loss, which may be existential, psychological, or material. Indeed, the *inner quests* undertaken by the protagonists tend to coincide with a search for something on the brink of erasure or already lost: time, childhood, youth, a loved one, memory, archive... At the same time, the crisis is also that of representation, including, of course, of self-representation for the self is necessarily always split. This explains the sense of dispersion that pervades the works, which shatters the illusion of a unified subject and reinforces the idea of identity as fluctuating and diffracted. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, this split is conveyed through narrative strategies, which rely on the multiplication and diversification of points of view and voices, thanks to the filmic apparatus, as in Dieutre's case, or to the actual presence of several witnesses and protagonists – the 'we' posited by Lebow –, who act as anchors or relays of the artists' self-inscription. For Otero, the self cannot be represented as isolated from the social circle while Calle's strategy consists in creating a dynamic narrative space assimilated to self-fiction and play, in which she negotiates her interaction with the other.

This also shows to what extent the process of self-invention in self-representation is conveyed in topographic terms, whereby the journey constitutes a recurrent figure. The dislocations are literal as much as metaphoric, that is simultaneously spatial,

temporal, and mental. As developed in Chapters 3 and 4, the works analysed abound in roads, tracks or horizon lines, essentially shown in lateral panoramic shots, which link geographic, temporal, as well as mental spaces. Yet, these lines and tracks simultaneously connect and separate, while the borders, which delineate foreign countries, regions, or even temporalities, are constantly crossed. For Dieutre, the self-reconstructive process is mostly temporal, by projecting himself in past, present, and future, he stages an existential search of lost time and eventually builds continuity within fragmentation, thereby combining the temporal characteristics of the four categories of self-representation analysed in Chapter 1: autobiography, diary, self-portrait, and essay. Otero's investigation simultaneously takes her in a forward and backward movement as she (like Alina Marazzi) looks into the pre-history of her family tragedy, which eventually becomes a utopian search of the lost mother beyond the archive, towards the origins. These explorations exceed the surface of the image and the limits of the cinematic frame, so that the tracks followed inevitably lead the authors to a more global reflection upon their work and status as artists. Moreover, the journeys' alternation of movement and halts echoes the inherently cinematic balance between stillness and movement, itself in keeping with the paradox between permanence and change that characterises identity. Thus, these patterns reflect and feed one another in the process of self-representation. For Calle this oscillation between movement and stillness is particularly illustrative of the therapeutic process in the staging of her heartaches. Overall, and this does not only apply to Calle, the performance constitutes a mode of compensation for and materialisation of the loss, absence, or crisis, so that *the artwork is what enables the self to process the loss*.

The space of the films and artworks thus becomes an outer space, a heterotopia of the self in which the subjects exteriorise their loss, crises, or quests by literally and metaphorically marking the territory on and through their media. In other words, the cinematic process does not merely reflect but is constitutive of self-exposure and transformation onto the very matter and plasticity of the medium. In concrete terms, the body is present in its most organic dimension through the expression of suffering, abjection, sexuality, or eroticism. As discussed in Chapter 5, it is combined with the heightened physicality of the image conveyed by the camera's haptic gaze, the intertwining of different film formats and media, in other words intermediality, which suggests depth beyond the surface, and thereby figures of sensation. These emerge at the junction between movement and stillness, and between film, painting, music,

literature, or physical objects. At the heart of these intermedial connections lies, of course, the artists' body, whose corporeality is linked to that of the filmic body by a process of *mise en abyme*. As a result, *the artist's body becomes a medium that enables the transformation of loss into the work of art*. At the same time, the artists' attempt to retake possession of their loss reveals by the same token its inexorable existence and visibility. The self finds itself on the threshold between the attempt to materialise absence and the statement of this aporia, hence the relevant notions of transition and in-betweenness that have pervaded this discussion and have come to constitute a recurrent pattern. This is reflected in the works' balance between absence and nowness or abstraction and concreteness. This duality also defines affect, emotions, sensations, and, above all, the condition inherent to the reciprocal relation between body and image.

The to and fro passage between body and image generated by the artists' performance draws attention to the body of the image, thereby suggesting depth beyond its surface. Depth, ultimately, harks back to the movement between the 'inner' and the 'outer' evoked earlier. And this circularity also finds expression in the recurrent patterns of passage, repetition, and transformation expounded in Chapter 6. In terms of gender, Butler posits a political significance in this boundary crossing which, I would argue, is epitomised by depth. However, for Rancière, depth has a broader political significance that goes beyond the scope of gender. The introduction of depth (perspective) in the image during the Renaissance partook of a response to the Platonic distinction between mute signs (the flat surface of the painting) and the act of 'living' speech: 'the reproduction of three-dimensional space was involved in the valorization of painting and the assertion of its ability to capture an act of living speech, the decisive moment of action and meaning.'<sup>3</sup> This is why Rancière rejects the opposition between the bi-dimensional pictorial surface (which would be its ontological nature) and the three-dimensional one. Instead, the flat surface should be opposed to the living act of speech. Moreover, '[a] "surface" is not simply a geometric composition of lines. It is a certain distribution of the sensible'.<sup>4</sup> An example of this distribution is the 'egalitarian intertwining of images and signs' in the context of typography, which counteracts Plato's hierarchization of the living speech over mute signs.<sup>5</sup> The interface thereby created between different media or, as one might want to call it, this *intermedial surface*, is political for Rancière because

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*, p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*, p. 17.

it revokes the twofold politics inherent in the logic of representation. On the one hand, this logic separated the world of artistic imitations from the world of vital concerns and politicosocial grandeur. On the other hand, its hierarchical organization – in particular the primacy of living speech/action over depicted images – formed an analogy with the socio-political order.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, depth, which is intrinsically intermedial, has a political resonance in that it transcends and thus subverts the separation established between political discourse and artistic mimesis. This is all the more relevant in the present context, in that artistic mimesis consists of self-representation. Thus, this separation could also refer to that between the ‘inner’ – including the inner world of the artist – and the ‘outer’, which comes to full circle.

As the artists extend the boundaries of their respective personal quests, they reach out to a wider social, historical, and political scope. In this respect, the taboos dealt with, AIDS, abortion, and suicide in *Un’Ora Sola ti Vorrei* embody the *abject*, that is, the absolutely *other*, which represents the object of exclusion for societies eager to preserve their control, as Butler argues.<sup>7</sup> And as far as abortion is concerned, the expulsion takes on a literal significance for it also signifies the rejection of sexuality reduced to reproduction. It is in this sense that self-representation also becomes political, as it subverts the taboo by bringing it *out of* the private sphere and *back into* the public space. Self-representation also consists in the liberation of a suspended gesture evoked by Agamben (as discussed in Chapter 6): just as it reconnects the instant of self-portraiture with the duration of autobiography, it reconnects a fragment (the self) to a whole (the social circle) by re-linking the inner and the outer. In this context, it would be interesting to reflect on the ways in which new forms of self-representation that have emerged throughout the world, especially in areas marked by war and political conflict,<sup>8</sup> have tended to perform the opposite gesture, that is to interiorise the political and social crisis, and how this, in turn, affects the image.

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<sup>6</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

<sup>8</sup> I am thinking in particular about films such as, to name only a few, *Five Broken Cameras* (Emad Burnat & Guy Davidi, Palestine/Israel/France/Netherlands, 2011); *Fix Me* (Raed Andoni, France/Palestine/Switzerland, 2009); *L’image manquante* (*The Missing Picture*, Rithy Panh, Cambodia; France, 2013).

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## APPENDIX

### SOPHIE CALLE

#### SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1953, lives in Malakoff.

Calle began to work in the late 1970s, after having spent several years travelling around the world. Upon her return to Paris, she started to randomly follow people in the streets, taking notes and photographs, until an acquaintance pointed out the artistic dimension of her wanderings and gave her the opportunity to present her work at the ‘Biennale des Jeunes de Paris’ in 1980. *Les Dormeurs (The Sleepers, 1979)* is considered to be her first consciously artistic performance. She is internationally renowned as a photographer, writer, performer, conceptual artist, and even as a video-maker and has lectured in different universities and art schools around the world. In 2007, she represented France at the Venice Biennale and won the Hasselblad Foundation International Award in Photography in 2010.

Her work tends to be structured around rules and constraints, forms of play and rituals, and mixes autobiographical with fictional elements. The patterns of dualism and reversibility, for instance voyeurism versus exhibitionism, pervade her artistic approach.<sup>1</sup> Admittedly, she is also interested in the themes of absence, lack, or disappearing. The narrative component of her work is essential and her photographs or performances are systematically accompanied by a written description in the style of a journalistic report.

#### PRESENTATION OF THE WORKS INCLUDED IN THE CASE STUDIES

- *DOUBLE BLIND/NO SEX LAST NIGHT, 1992*

Directed in collaboration with Greg Shepard. Bohem Foundation, New York/Gemini Films, USA/France. Video, English and French language, partly subtitled, colour.

Calle’s introduction to the version presented at the retrospective M’as-Tu Vue (*see below*):

We had been living together for a year but our relationship had deteriorated. We had completely stopped talking to each other. I dreamt of marrying him.

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<sup>1</sup> On this subject, see, for instance, Katie Clifford, ‘Scopophilia, Exhibitionism, and the Art of Sophie Calle’, *Art Criticism*, 10 (1994), 59-65.

He dreamt of making films. To convince him to cross America with me I had suggested that we make a film during the trip. He accepted. Out of our lack of communication came the idea of taking a video camera each and use it as the sole confidant of our frustrations. We would secretly tell the camera everything we could not tell each other. Once we had established the rule of the game, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1992, we left New York towards California in his grey Cadillac.

*M'as-Tu Vue*, exhibition catalogue, *op. cit.*, p. 325 (my translation).

M'AS-TU VUE (19 NOVEMBER 2003-15 MARCH 2004, CENTRE POMPIDOU, PARIS), SELECTED WORKS PRESENTED AT THE RETROSPECTIVE:

- *DES JOURNÉES ENTIÈRES SOUS LE SIGNE DU B, DU C DU W (DAYS UNDER THE SIGN OF B, C, & W)*, 1998\*

Four diptychs:

**BB**: framed colour photograph & framed text, 67 × 67 cm each

**C for Confessional**: framed black & white photograph & framed text, 67 × 67 cm each

**C for Cemetery**: framed black & white photograph & framed text, 67 × 67 cm each

**W**: framed colour photograph & framed text, 67 × 67 cm each

Calle's introduction to the installation:

In *Leviathan*, Paul Auster describes his character Maria as follows: 'At other times, she would make... decisions based on the letters of the alphabet. Whole days spent under the spell of *b*, *c*, or *w*.'<sup>2</sup>

For us to get closer, Maria and I, I decided to abide to the book. I spent the day of the 10<sup>th</sup> March, under the spell of B, those of the 16<sup>th</sup> February and the 19<sup>th</sup> March, under the spell of C, of that of the 14<sup>th</sup> March, under the spell of W.

Introduction to the installation, Sophie Calle, *M'as-Tu Vue*, exhibition catalogue, *op. cit.*, p. 289, my translation.

- *DIE ENTFERNUNG = THE DETACHMENT (SOUVENIRS DE BERLIN-EST)*, 1996\*

In 1996, at the invitation of the Arndt Gallery (Berlin), Calle travelled to Berlin and investigated on the disappearing of monuments or symbols in the Eastern part of the city that had a particular political significance in the former GDR. She asked passers-by in the street to describe the missing objects out of memory.

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\* The technical data (as in all further descriptions marked by an asterisk) is borrowed from the catalogue *raisonné* compiled for the exhibition *M'as Tu Vue* and describes the works in their installation format. See Cécile Camart 'Catalogue Raisonné des Œuvres', in Sophie Calle *M'as-Tu Vue*, exhibition catalogue, *op. cit.*, pp. 433-436.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Auster, *Leviathan*, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

Installation comprising 12 elements:

*Lenin (Russian Embassy)*

A framed colour photograph, 112 × 87 cm, a book

*Lenin Memorial*

A framed colour photograph, 132 × 102 cm, a book

*Library (Bebelplatz)*

A framed colour photograph, 72 × 97 cm, a book

*Combat Group Memorial*

A framed colour photograph, 87 × 112 cm, a book

*Relief and Child*

A framed colour photograph, 87 × 112 cm, a book

*GDR Insignia*

A framed colour photograph, 132 × 102 cm, a book

*Deserters Memorial Plaque*

A framed colour photograph, 92 × 72 cm, a book

*New Guard House (Neue Wache)*

A framed colour photograph, 112 × 87 cm, a book

*Soldier (Soviet Cemetery)*

A framed colour photograph, 112 × 87 cm, a book

*Peace-Dove (Nikolaiviertel)*

A framed colour photograph, 132 × 102 cm, a book

*Street Sign (Wihelm-Pieck-Straße)*

A framed colour photograph, 87 × 112, a book

*The Wall*

A framed colour photograph, 35 × 44 cm, a book

- *DOULEUR EXQUISE (EXQUISITE PAIN), 1984-2003\**

Co-production with the Centre Pompidou. Installation consisting of three sections:

*Avant la Douleur (Before the Pain):*

92 framed elements including colour and black & white photographs, letters, several documents, frame size varies between 21 × 16 cm and 82 × 124 cm.

*Intermediate room (The Moment or Location of Pain)*

Reconstitution of a hotel room

*Après la Douleur (After the Pain)*

72 diptychs, each one composed of a text panel embroidered on grey linen, 120 × 160 cm, and a framed colour photograph 60 × 48 cm; one text embroidered on

white linen, 120 × 160 cm and a framed colour or black & white photograph, 60 × 48 cm.

In 1984, I was awarded a three-month scholarship by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to go and study in Japan. I left on the 25<sup>th</sup> October, without knowing that this date would mark the start of a countdown of ninety-two days that would lead to a breakup, which is banal, but which I experienced then as the most painful moment of my life. I held this trip for responsible. Back in France, on the 28<sup>th</sup> January 1985, I chose to tell my suffering, to cast it out, rather than telling my trip. In return, I asked my interlocutors, friends of random encounters: 'When did you suffer the most?' This exchange would cease when I would have exhausted my own story, having told it so many times, or having put my pain in perspective with that of others. The method did the trick. I was healed in three months. Once the exorcism had succeeded, out of fear of a relapse, I put my project aside. To unearth it fifteen years later.'

Introduction to the installation, Sophie Calle, *M'as-Tu Vue*, exhibition catalogue, *op. cit.*, p. 353, my translation.

- *GHOSTS, 1989-1991*\*

Series composed of 6 elements:

*Le fantôme, (Bonnard, Nu dans le Bain)* (1989)

Silkscreen printed text, synthetic polymer, oil, colour photographs, 98 × 155 cm

*Ghosts (Magritte, The Menaced Assassin)* (1991)

Silkscreen printed text, synthetic polymer, oil, colour photographs, 208 × 234 cm

*Ghosts (Modigliani, Lying Nude)* (1991)

Silkscreen printed text, synthetic polymer, oil, colour photographs, 71 × 117 cm

*Ghosts (De Chirico, The Enigma of a Day)* (1991)

Silkscreen printed text, synthetic polymer, oil, colour photographs, 234 × 211 cm

*Ghosts (Hopper, House by the Railroad)* (1991)

Silkscreen printed text, synthetic polymer, oil, colour photographs, 96.5 × 122 cm

*Ghosts (Seurat, Evening, Honfleur)* (1991)

Silkscreen printed text, synthetic polymer, oil, colour photographs, 66 × 81 cm

In June 1989, I was invited to take part in an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art of the City of Paris. The Nude in the Bath by Bonnard had been temporarily lent so, in front of its location left empty, I asked the curators, wardens and other permanent staff to describe it to me and to draw it. I replaced the missing painting with these memories.

In October 1991, I repeated the experience at the Museum of Modern Art in New York with five paintings by Magritte, Modigliani, De Chirico, Hopper, and Seurat.

Introduction to the installation, Sophie Calle, *M'as-Tu Vue*, exhibition catalogue, *op. cit.*, p. 393, my translation.

- *LA FILATURE (THE DETECTIVE), 1981*\*

Diptych, framed text and framed colour and black & white photographs, 162 × 110 cm.

Under my instructions, in April 1981, my mother went to the agency, 'Duluc, private detectives'. She contracted them to follow me and asked for a written detailed of my timetable, as well as a series of photographs as evidence.

Introduction to the installation, Sophie Calle, *M'as-Tu Vue*, exhibition catalogue, *op. cit.*, p. 101, my translation.

- *LAST SEEN (1991)*\*

Series of 10 photographs and texts:

*Last Seen... (Manet, The Journalist) (1991)*

One framed colour photograph, 136 × 164 cm

One framed text, 41 × 49.5 cm

*Last Seen... (Rembrandt, The Storm on the Sea of Galilee) (1991)*

One framed colour photograph, 242 × 155 cm

One framed text, 163 × 131 cm

*Last Seen... (Rembrandt, Portrait of a Couple) (1991)*

One framed colour photograph, 242 × 155 cm

One framed text, 163 × 131 cm

*Last Seen... (Rembrandt, Self-Portrait) (1991)*

One framed colour photograph, 90 × 70 cm

One framed text, 39 × 37 cm

*Last Seen... (Vermeer, The Concert) (1991)*

One framed colour photograph, 169 × 129 cm

One framed text, 86 × 79 cm

*Last Seen... (Flinck, Landscape with Obelisk) (1991)*

One framed colour photograph, 169 × 129 cm

One framed text, 68 × 85.5 cm

*Last Seen... (Beaker) (1991)*

One framed colour photograph, 114 × 141 cm

One framed text, 51 × 51 cm

*Last Seen... (The Eagle) (1991)*

One framed colour photograph, 83 × 60 cm

One framed text, 49 × 49 cm

*Last Seen... (Degas, Drawings) (1991)*

One framed colour photograph, 182 × 116 cm

One framed text, 146 × 80 cm

*Last Seen... (Picasso, Head) (1991)*

One framed colour photograph, 104.5 × 78.5 cm

One framed text, 72.5 × 50 cm

On March the 18<sup>th</sup>, six paintings by Rembrandt, Manet, Flinck, and Vermeer, five drawings by Degas, a vase/jar, and a French Imperial Eagle were stolen at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. Isabella Stewart Gardner, who had been living there before donating the house to the city, had explicitly stated in her testament that nothing should be altered after her death. Therefore, after the theft, the spaces that had been occupied by the paintings and the objects remained empty. I photographed this

involuntary *mise en scène* of absence and asked the museum directors, the attendants et other permanent members of staff do describe to me the objects that had disappeared.

Introduction to the installation, Sophie Calle, *M'as-Tu Vue*, exhibition catalogue, *op. cit.*, p. 401 (my translation.)

- *LE RITUEL D'ANNIVERSAIRE (THE BIRTHDAY CEREMONY)*, 1980-1993\*

Fifteen display cabinets entailing miscellaneous personal objects, 170 × 78 × 40 cm.

On my birthday, I am afraid of being forgotten. To deliver myself from this worry, I took the decision in 1980 to invite every year on the 9<sup>th</sup> October, if possible, the same number of guests as my age. Among them, a stranger who would be chosen by one of other guests? I did not use the presents. I kept them so as to keep at hand the proofs of affection they represented. In 1993, at the age of 40, I put an end to this ritual.

Introduction to the installation, Sophie Calle, *M'as-Tu Vue*, exhibition catalogue, *op. cit.*, p. 261, my translation.

- *SUITE VÉNITIENNE*, 1980\*

Composition presented in this way since 1996: 55 black & white photographs, 17,1 × 23,6 cm; 23 texts; 3 maps.

I was following strangers in the street. For the pleasure of following them and not because I was interested in them. I would photograph them without their knowledge, write down their movements, and eventually lose track of them and forget them.

At the end of January 1980, I followed a man in the streets of Paris whose trace I lost a few minutes later in the crowd. That evening, by total coincidence, I was introduced to him at a reception. During the conversation, he told me he was about to set off on a trip to Venice. I decided to stick to dog his footsteps, to follow him.

Introduction to the installation, Sophie Calle, *M'as-Tu Vue*, exhibition catalogue, *op. cit.*, p. 85, my translation.

- *UNE JEUNE FEMME DISPARAÎT (A YOUNG WOMAN VANISHES)*, 2003\*

In 2000, in Paris, a 28 year-old woman, Bénédicte Vincens, disappeared after her flat caught fire. Calle found herself involved when the press revealed that the woman worked at the Centre Pompidou and was known to admire the artist. Intrigued, Calle went to her place and took photographs.

Installation composed of 16 framed photographs, 64 × 80 cm, one framed silkscreen printed text, 151 × 121 cm, one silkscreen printed mirror, one chair, several copies of a missing person's sign.

I went to her place.  
I photographed her burnt down flat.  
I picked up her charred negatives.

Introduction to the installation, Sophie Calle, *M'as-Tu Vue*, exhibition catalogue, *op. cit.*, p. 125, my translation.

At the Centre Pompidou, I met colleagues of Bénédicte Vincens. They told me that she showed an interest for the public's behaviour and wanted to use her position as a museum attendant to study the visitors.

On the occasion of the exhibition, *M'as-Tu Vue*, I decided to follow this aim in her name.

Introduction to the installation, Sophie Calle, *M'as-Tu Vue*, exhibition catalogue, *op. cit.*, p. 136 (my translation).

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RACHEL, MONIQUE (20 OCTOBER 2010-27 NOVEMBER 2010, PALAIS DE TOKYO PARIS), SELECTED WORKS PRESENTED AT THE EXHIBITION:<sup>3</sup>

She was successively called Rachel, Monique, Szyndler, Calle, Pagliero, Gonthier, Sindler. My mother liked people to talk about her. Her life does not appear in my work. It irritated her. When I placed my camera by the bed in which she was agonising, because I feared she might die in my absence, while I wanted to be there, her last work, she exclaimed: 'at last!'

Sophie Calle, introduction to the exhibition.

- *NORTH POLE, 2009*

Light box, sandblasted porcelain plaque, video, screen, colour photograph, frame.

Yesterday I buried my mother's jewels on Northern Glacier. I was Lucky. A few meters further south and I would have landed on Starvation Glacier. She had a dream. Go to the North Pole. It was a part of our life: One day she would go. She died two years ago having preserved her dream. I guess that's why she never went.

I never had this dream. It was hers. But I was invited to go to the North Pole. And may be I went a little for her. To take her there.

In my suitcase: a photo, a necklace, a ring.

I chose a portrait of her in the snow. Winter holidays.

Her white and red Chanel necklace. I grew up with those pearls around her neck.

And her diamond ring. During the war my grandfather, running away from the Germans to hide in the mountains of Grenoble, afraid a building he owned would be seized, exchanged it for a diamond ring. Not a good deal. My grandmother did not talk to him for a year.

So I waited to reach the most northern place of this trip, where I could go ashore with my mother.

Laurie, my roommate on the boat, suggested that, if the weather did not allow us to do so, I still could flush the ring down the toilet. Actually, it is a thought my mother would have loved. During a few minutes I imagine her laughing to tears to this idea. But the weather was good.

I chose a beautiful stone in the center of the beach

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<sup>3</sup> And in an altered version at the Avignon Festival: Cloître des Célestins, 7-28 July 2012.

I buried the portrait, the necklace, the diamond. Cried a little. Took a photo. Martha sang a verse of Marilyn Monroe – my mother’s other passion along with the North Pole - diamonds are a girl’s best friend.

Now, my mother has gone to the North Pole.

I wonder if her glacier will advance or retreat, if the climate changes will carry her to the sea to be taken north by the West Greenland current, or retreat up the valley towards the ice cap, or if she will stay on the beach as a marker in time where the glacier was in the Holocene period.

And maybe in thousands of years, specialists in glaciology will find her ring and discuss endlessly this flash of diamond in Inuit culture.

Or if a treasure hunter or beachcomber will discover it and exchange it for a house in the mountains of Grenoble.

Sophie Calle, presentation of the installation

(Source: ‘The first time I used in a text the words “climate change”, *op. cit.*)

- *PAS PU SAISIR LA MORT (COULDN’T CATCH DEATH), 2007*

Video of the last moments of Calle’s mother as she lay on her deathbed. On loop.

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- *OÙ ET QUAND? BERCK (WHERE AND WHEN? BERK), 2005*

In 2005, Sophie Calle consulted a clairvoyant who, according to the message she read in her tarot cards, gave her a series of instructions to follow.

Monday May 17, 2004, I left Malakoff at 8.55 a.m. I reached Gare du Nord a few minutes before the departure of the train for Rang du Fliers. All I knew was that I had to go to Berck and, as soon as I arrived, contact my clairvoyant so that she could give me instructions as to what to do next. I had asked Maud Kristen to predict my future so that I could go to meet it, and catch up to it. Where? When? What? She refused. I cut back my ambitions: Where and When? She agreed to give it a try, to do a test before committing herself more seriously. She drew the cards: ‘The first train, next Monday, to Berck. I don’t know why they want to make you go there – we’re going to find out. Once you get to the station, call me and we’ll see.’

Sophie Calle, Introduction to the installation. (Source: Galerie Perrotin, *op. cit.*)

12 framed photographs 36.3 × 48.4 cm, 14 framed texts 36.3 × 22.2, 1 neon light 16 × 43 cm, one video screen 36.3 × 43 cm.

Source: Galerie Perrotin, [https://www.perrotin.com/Sophie\\_Calle-works-oeuvres-14443-1.html](https://www.perrotin.com/Sophie_Calle-works-oeuvres-14443-1.html) [accessed: 12 May 2015].

- *OÙ ET QUAND? LOURDES (WHERE AND WHEN? LOURDES), 2005*

Later in the year, Calle repeated the experience with the clairvoyant:

I had asked Maud Kristen, a clairvoyant, to predict my future so that I could meet it, and catch up to it. On Monday May 17, 2005, the cards sent me to Berck. The experiment was a success. ‘We’ll start again after the summer break’, said Maud.

Sophie Calle, Introduction to the installation. (Source: Galerie Perrotin, *op. cit.*)  
 18 framed photographs 36.3 × 48.4 cm, 15 framed texts 36.3 × 22.2, 68 marble plaques (varied dimensions), 1 metal plaque 140 × 246 cm, 4 candle-holder and 1 earthenware shelf.

Source: Galerie Perrotin, [https://www.perrotin.com/Sophie\\_Calle-works-oeuvres-15126-1.html](https://www.perrotin.com/Sophie_Calle-works-oeuvres-15126-1.html) [accessed: 12 May 2015].

- *PRENEZ SOIN DE VOUS (TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF), 2007*

I received a breakup email. I couldn't reply. I was as if it wasn't addressed to me. It ended with the words: 'Take care of yourself'. I took this recommendation to the letter. I asked 107 women – of whom, one with feathers and two made of wood – chosen for the profession, their talent, to interpret the letter from a professional angle, to analyse it, to play it, to dance it, to sing it, to dissect it, to exhaust it, to understand for my.

To speak on my behalf.

A way to take the time to break up. At my own rhythm.

To take care of myself.

Sophie Calle, *Prenez Soins de Vous* (Paris: Actes Sud, 2007), p.15

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#### OTHERS WORKS EVOKED IN THE THESIS

- *CHAMBRE À COUCHER (BEDROOM) 2003\**

Reconstitution of a bedroom with objects related to the *True Stories* and their corresponding texts.

- *GOTHAM HANDBOOK (IN COLLABORATION WITH PAUL AUSTER)\**

Set of 2 framed texts, 64 × 68 cm and 34 × 68 cm, 7 framed panels including a text, black & white photographs, documents, 143 × 86 cm, one colour photograph under Plexiglas, 180 × 120 cm, one framed text, 14 × 24 cm.

In the book *Leviathan* [...], Paul Auster thanks me for having authorised him to mix reality with fiction [...]

Since in *Leviathan*, Paul Auster used me as a subject, I thought of reversing the roles, using him as the author of my acts. I asked him to invent a fictional character to whom I would try too look like [...]

Introduction to the installation, Sophie Calle, *M'as-Tu Vue*, exhibition catalogue, *op. cit.*, p. 273, my translation.

- *HISTOIRES VRAIES (TRUE STORIES)*, AKA *AUTOBIOGRAPHIES*, 1988-2003\*

A series of 30 stories composed of a photograph (varied dimensions), and a framed text, 50 × 50 cm.

*La Dispute (The Quarrel)*, 1992

*La Rivale (The Rival)*, 1992

*Le Faux Mariage (The Fake Marriage)*, 1992

*La Rupture (The Breakup)*, 1992

*Le Divorce (The Divorce)* 1992

These are all related to her relationship with Greg Shepard.

*Voyage en Californie (Trip to California)*, 2003

In collaboration with Josh Greene. In 1999, Calle sent her bed to San Francisco, to help J. Greene recover from a heartache.

*Chambre avec Vue (Room with a View)*, 2002

On the 5<sup>th</sup> October 2002 Sophie Calle placed her bed in a space temporarily turned into a bedroom on the fourth floor of the Eiffel Tower, where she spent the night and invited people to come and to tell her a story so that she would stay awake (performance organised on the occasion of the art festival *Nuit Blanche*).

- *L'HÔTEL (THE HOTEL)*, 1981\*

A series of 21 framed diptychs, each one composed of one colour photograph, 5 to 9 black & white photographs, and text, 102 × 142 cm.

The text and photographs document the artist's spying on the guests of a hotel in Venice, in which she was hired as a chambermaid, and on her rummaged through their belongings.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> February 1981, I managed [...] to be hired as a chambermaid for a three-week substitution in a hotel in Venice: the C Hotel.

I was given twelve rooms on the fourth floor. During my cleaning hours, I observed the personal effects of the travellers, the signs of provisory installations of certain guests, their succession in the same room. I observed in detail lives that remained strangers to me [...]

Introduction to the installation, Sophie Calle, *M'as-Tu Vue*, exhibition catalogue, *op. cit.*, p. 157, my translation.

- *LE RÉGIME CHROMATIQUE (THE CHROMATIC DIET)* 1997\*

Six framed colour photographs, 30 × 30 cm each, one framed colour photograph, 49 × 73.5 cm, 7 meals on display, one shelf.

In *Leviathan*, Paul Auster describes his character Maria as follows: ‘Some weeks, she would indulge in what she called ‘the chromatic diet’, restricting herself to foods of a single color on any given day.’<sup>4</sup>

For us to get closer, Maria and I, I decided to abide to the book in the week from between 8<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> December 1997.

Introduction to the installation, Sophie Calle, *M’as-Tu Vue*, exhibition catalogue, *op. cit.*, p. 281, my translation.

- *LE STRIP-TEASE (THE STRIPEASE), 1979*\*

Framed black & white photographs and framed text (dimensions unknown).

In 1979 she stripped every night in a fairground stall for several weeks.

- *LES DORMEURS (THE SLEEPERS) 1979*\*

23 series of 5 to 12 black & white photographs and 23 texts accompanying them, 15 × 20 cm each.

Sophie Calle invited friends and strangers to come and sleep in her bed for eight hours each during eight days while she took notes and a photograph of them every hour.

- *VINGT ANS APRÈS, 2001*\*

Installation composed of 32 colour photographs, 17.5 × 25.8 cm or 25.8 × 17.5 cm, one black & white photograph, 80 × 60 cm, 8 texts, 30 × 231 cm.

Under my instructions, my mother had gone to the agency, ‘Duluc, private detectives’. She had asked for me to be followed.

The investigation took place on the 16<sup>th</sup> April 1981.

Twenty years later, at Emmanuel Perrotin’s request, a detective from the Duluc agency followed me on the 16<sup>th</sup> April 2001.

Introduction to the installation, Sophie Calle, *M’as-Tu Vue*, exhibition catalogue, *op. cit.*, p. 113, my translation.

**FURTHER REFERENCES: SELECTED PUBLICATIONS BY SOPHIE CALLE**

*Double-Jeux* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1998):

*À Suivre..., Livre IV*

*De l’Obéissance, Livre I*

*Double Game* (London: Violette Editions, 1999):

‘Days Under the Sign of B, C, & W’, pp. 22-31

‘Suite Vénitienne’, pp. 76-121

‘The Birthday Ceremony’, pp. 196-231

‘The Chromatic Diet’, pp. 12-23

<sup>4</sup> Paul Auster, *Leviathan*, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

‘The Detective’, pp. 122-139

‘The Gotham Handbook’, in collaboration with Paul Auster, pp. 233-295

*Die Entfernung/The Detachment* (Berlin: G + B Arts International, 1998). Reprinted in French under the title: *Souvenirs de Berlin-Est* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1999)

*L’Hôtel* (Paris: Éditions de l’Étoile, 1984)

*M’as-Tu Vue*, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Xavier Barral/Centre Pompidou, 2003)

*Où et Quand? Berck* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2008)

*Où et Quand? Lourdes* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2009)

*Prenez Soins de Vous*, (Paris: Actes Sud, 2007)

*Rachel, Monique* (Paris: Xavier Barral, 2012)

‘The First Time I Used in a Text the Words “Climate Change”’, blog, <http://www.capefarewell.com/diskobay/using-the-words-climate-change/> [accessed 2 April 2015]

*True Stories*, Hasselblad Award 2010 (Steidl: Hasselblad Foundation, 2010)

## VINCENT DIEUTRE

### SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1960, lives in Paris.

Vincent Dieutre studied art history before entering the National Film School in Paris, where he also taught.<sup>1</sup> He was awarded the scholarship ‘Villa Médicis Hors les Murs’ and spent many years abroad (in Italy among other countries) before starting to make films. His work tends to focus on the relationship between cinema and contemporary arts; he writes regularly in critical journals (*La Lettre du Cinéma*, among others) and is involved in film curating with an association called Point Ligne Plan (<http://www.pointligneplan.com>). Among the other themes he explores, his homosexuality and the boundaries between documentary and fiction occupy a prominent place. An experimental filmmaker working outside the commercial network, he remains generally unknown abroad and outside the art cinema and experimental film circuits. Most of his films have had national release in France – albeit very limited – and

<sup>1</sup> IDHEC: Institut des Hautes Études Cinématographiques. Since 1986: École nationale supérieure des métiers de l’image et du Son, better known as Fondation Européenne des Métiers de l’Image et du Son (FEMIS).

were shown at several festivals, often under the LGBT label. For instance, *Fragments sur la grâce* was shown at the Locarno International Film Festival in August 2006, so did *Bologna Centrale* in 2003, which was also screened at the International Film Festival of Rotterdam in 2004. *Mon Voyage d'Hiver* premiered at the Berlin Film Festival in 2003 and was on the Cannes Film Market in the same year while *Leçons de Ténèbres* and *Bonne nouvelle* were screened respectively at the San Francisco and Bordeaux Gay and Lesbian Film Festivals in 2000 and 2004. Since *Jaurès*, which premiered at the documentary film festival of the Centre Pompidou in Paris (Festival du Réel) in 2013, Dieutre's interest seems to be slightly shifting away from self-representation to focus on more explicitly political and aesthetic issues.

#### PRESENTATION OF THE WORKS SELECTED FOR THE CASE STUDIES

- *ROME DÉSOLÉE (DESOLATE ROME)*

GREC (Groupe de Recherches et d'essais cinématographiques), France, 1995, 75 minutes, 16 mm, colour.

Contemporary footage, shot on 16 mm, of the city of Rome is intertwined with television images of the first war in Iraq and television adverts while the film-maker systematically remains off screen. The voice over narrative tells of the years he spent in Rome in the early 1980s and revolves around his search for drugs and sexual encounters.

- *LEÇONS DE TÉNÈBRES (TENEBRAE LESSONS)*

Les Films de la Croisade, France/Belgium, 2000, 77 minutes, 35 mm/Super 8/DV, colour.

Dieutre undertakes an exploration of the Caravaggist movement that sets him on a journey across Europe, from Utrecht, to Naples, and finally, to Rome. This aesthetic quest, which includes an interview with art historian Leo Bersani, is woven together with the story of Vincent's relationship with his partner, Tadeusz, who joins him in Utrecht and Rome. Visits to museums are intertwined with images of the cities at night and extra-diegetic sequences shot in a dark room on Super 8, in which Dieutre experiments with chiaroscuro lighting. Here too, the story conveyed through a carefully constructed voice over narrative, in which Vincent addresses himself or his partner.

- *BOLOGNA CENTRALE*

Les Films de la Croisade, France, 2003, 61 minutes, 16 mm, colour.

Dieutre returns to Bologna for the first time in almost twenty years. This is an occasion for him to reassess the period he spent there in the late 1970s, which is that of his first love and of the beginning of his drug addiction. While the film-maker remains off screen most of the time, but not systematically, the voice over narrative consists of spontaneous comments about the city in the present day, as well as reminiscences of his stay back in the past. The political context of the Italian years of lead is extremely present and constitutes more than a mere historical background, as many of Vincent's friends then were political activists (involved in the *Lotta Continua* faction). Moreover, the film's title refers to the railway station, which was bombed by a neo-fascist group in 1980, just a few days after Vincent's last visit to Bologna.

- *MON VOYAGE D'HIVER (MY WINTER JOURNEY)*

Films sans Frontières, France, 2003, 104 minutes, 16 mm/DV, colour.

Dieutre drives with his godson, Itvan, from Paris to Berlin, where the teenager will be reunited with his mother. The film is built like a travel diary as they drive across Germany's snowy landscape. They stop in different places and visit Vincent's friends – former partners (among whom, in particular, Georg in Stuttgart and Werner in Dresden). This gives Dieutre the occasion to evoke in voice-over mode his past relationship with these men, as well as his love of German culture, which he tries to transmit to Itvan. The voice over narrative is intertwined with extra-diegetic musical sequences in which a quartet performs in a recording studio extracts from Franz Schubert's *Winter Journey*, among other pieces. The film's flow follows the movements of Schubert's music, which articulates the narrative (and the mood) into four different tableaux: 'Tübingen, Stuttgart, *sehr langsam*' (very slow); 'Nürnberg, Regensburg, Bamberg, *feierlich*' (playful); to Weimar, Leipzig, *mit Leidenschaft*' (with passion); 'Dresden, Berlin, *ruhevoll*' (peaceful).

- *SAKIS, UN TOMBEAU (SAKIS, A GRAVE)*

Installation: Video, two mural screens (colour), television monitor (black & white), candles, incense, music, and voice.

Conceived for an exhibition entitled Beyond the Soundtrack curated by Anne-Laure Chamboissier, École Nationale Supérieure d'Art/La Box, Bourges (France), 8 December 2011-14 January 2012.

Dieutre films the streets of Thessaloniki while reminiscing a Greek friend, Sakis, who died of AIDS over twenty years ago.

#### **OTHER FILMS BY VINCENT DIEUTRE**

*Lettre de Berlin (Letters from Berlin)*  
(France/Germany 1988, short film, 16 mm)

*Bonne nouvelle*  
(Arte 'La lucarne', France, 2001, 60 minutes, DV)

*Entering Indifference*  
(Le GREC, France, 2001, 28 minutes, DV)

*Fragments sur la grâce (Fragments on Grace)*  
(Celluloid Dreams/Simple Productions, France/Belgium, 2006, 101 minutes, 35 mm)

*Después de la revolución (After the Revolution)*  
(France, Bonne Nouvelle Production, 2007, 55 minutes, video)

*Jaurès*  
(La Huit Productions, France, 2012, 83 minutes, DV)

*Déchirés/Graves, (Torn/Serious)*  
(La Huit Productions, France, 2012, 82 minutes, DV)

*Orlando Ferito (Roland Wounded)*  
(La Huit Productions, France, 2013, 121 minutes, HDCam)

*Viaggio nella Dopo-Storia (Journey into Post-History)*  
(La Huit Productions, France/Italy, 2015, format unknown)

### **MARIANA OTERO**

#### **SHORT BIOGRAPHY**

Born in 1963, lives in Paris.

Mariana Otero graduated from the National Film School in Paris (IDHEC), which she joined in 1986 (shortly before its transformation into the FEMIS). She specialised immediately in documentary, explaining her choice as a negative reaction against the way in which an old fashioned idea of cinema – fiction, in the school's acceptance of the term, according to her – was taught at the IDHEC: 'The school wanted us to believe that there was one way in which shooting had to be done. It consisted in miming professional cinema, miming a film crew, all positions had to filled with assistants for

everything, it was unbelievably artificial.’<sup>1</sup> Overall, Otero investigated issues such as life in prison, the homeless, the legal system for children in France, the working class and women’s conditions. Her film *La Loi du Collège* won her national recognition as a documentary-maker. Commissioned by the French German television channel Arte, the film is the result of her following pupils for a year in a secondary school located in a Parisian suburb known as difficult. Between 1995 and 2000, Otero lived in Portugal where she made *Cette Télévision est la Vôtre*, which documents the backstage of one of the biggest private television channels of the country. The film reveals the overwhelming weight of advertising in the definition and constitution of the television programmes. *Histoire d’un secret* marked her shift from television to cinema. *Entre nos Mains* was released in 2010 and focuses on female employees of the textile industry in Northern who try to prevent their factory from being closed down by turning it into a cooperative. For her last documentary, *À Ciel Ouvert*, Otero spent two years in an institution influenced by Lacanian psychoanalysis to film children suffering from psychological disorders. Gradually, the presence of the camera is integrated in the clinical process.

- *HISTOIRE D’UN SECRET (HISTORY OF A SECRET)*

Archipel 35, France, 2003, 95 minutes, video, colour.

The film focuses on the death of Otero’s mother, Clotilde Vautier, who died in 1968 of the consequences of a back-alley abortion. Otero was four years old and has no recollection of the event or of her mother; her sister, Isabel, was seven. Their father, Antonio, did not tell his daughters immediately about Clotilde’s death, but pretended instead that she was preparing an exhibition in Paris. When, about a year later, Isabel understood the situation, the girls were told that she had died of appendicitis and it is only in the 1990s that Antonio finally confessed the full truth. The film thus documents Otero’s investigation into her mother’s death by interviewing family and friends. Clotilde was a promising painter, so that her work is given a prominent place in the film.<sup>2</sup> As a result, *Histoire d’un Secret* also documents the preparation of the retrospective organised at the Théâtre national de Bretagne (Rennes, France), which

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<sup>1</sup> Mariana Otero, interview with Marie-Anne Guérin and Frédéric Strauss, ‘Le cinéma contre l’Idhec’, *Cahiers du cinéma*, 491 (May, 1995), 52 (my translation).

<sup>2</sup> For further information on Clotilde Vautier’s work, see Sylvie Blottière-Derrien, *Clotilde Vautier*, introd. by Nancy Huston (Rennes: Éditions du Carabe, 2004).

provides an implicit narrative leading thread. The film closes on the vernissage of the exhibition.

**OTHER FILMS BY MARIANA OTERO**

*Non-lieux (Non Places)*

(Yumi productions La Sept, France, 1991, 70 minutes, video)

*La Loi du Collège (School Law)*

(La Sept-Arte, France, 1994, 156 minutes, video)

*Cette Télévision est la Vôtre (This is Your TV Too)*

(Archipel 33/IPACA, France/Portugal, 1997, 60 minutes, video)

*Peines d'Enfants (English title unknown)*

(CinéTévé, La Cinquième, France, 2000, 52 minutes, video)

*Entre nos Mains (In Our Hands)*

(Archipel 35, France, 2010, 86 minutes, video)

*À Ciel Ouvert (Like an Open Sky)*

(Archipel 35, France/Belgium, 2013, 110 minutes, video)